SPECIAL WARFARE

LESSONS LEARNED

SDF: THE PARTNER OF CHOICE IN SYRIA

SPECIAL OPERATIONS
IN SYRIA

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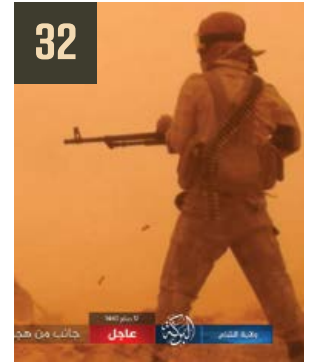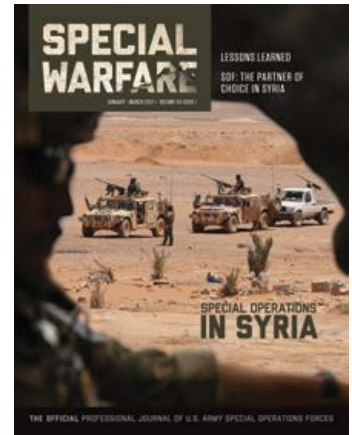## DEPARTMENTS

ON THE COVER

Army Special Operations Soldiers, alongside Syrian Partner Forces, conduct a patrol in support of combat operations in Syria.

U.S. Army Photo Illustration

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SUBSCRIBE

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from the
COMMANDANT

From the birth of al-Qaeda in Afghanistan, and the attacks of 9/11, Army Special Operations Forces have spent almost 20 years focused on eliminating the organization, its leaders and the violence and destruction that has followed in its wake. Initially headquartered in Afghanistan, the group has evolved in not only its violence, but also in its reach. In 2006, al-Qaeda in Iraq was formed, and in March 2011, a branch of al-Qaeda was founded in Syria, known as Jabhat al-Nusra li-Ahl al-Sham, later to become the Al-Nusra Front.

Throughout my career, I have served in Afghanistan, Iraq and most recently Syria. I have watched as al-Qaeda has evolved, and have built relationships with the Soldiers in each country that were fighting back against the terror they impose. Prior to taking command of the Special Warfare Center and School, I served as the Commander of the Special Operations Joint Task Force-OIR responsible for the SOF fight against the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria. In this issue, we focus specifically on the Syria campaign, and the successes we had there.

PATRICK B. ROBERSON
MAJOR GENERAL, USA
COMMANDING GENERAL

> **"To understand the complexity of the war against the Islamic State Group, one must understand the tribal allegiances and the design of the state-sponsored military that had to stand against the non-state actors in Iraq and Syria.**
>
> — *Maj. Gen. Patrick Roberson*

ANNOUNCEMENTS

3rd Quarter FY21 Army Boards

6-23 APR 2021: Captain, Army Promotion Selection Board (PSB)

12-30 APR 2021: Chief, Warrant Officer 3/4/5 PSB & Warrant Officer SELCON

30 MAR - 23 APR 2021: Major, Army PSB & CPT ACC SELCON/ACC ILE

2-22 JUN 2021: CY22 U.S. Army Reserve, Lieutenant Colonel Command Assignment Board

8-18 JUN 2021: CY22 U.S. Army Reserve, Colonel Command Assignment Board

PSYCHOLOGICAL OPERATIONS

DA Pam 600-25, Updates for CMF 37

The Psychological Operations Proponent, in collaboration with senior enlisted leaders from across the regiment updated and rewrote the Psychological Operations Career Progression Plan and chapters within DA PAM 600-25, U.S. Army Noncommissioned Officer Development Guide. Updates included restructuring the chapters utilizing the framework and writing style used by other Career Management Fields across the Army, reducing redundant information, combining sections containing duplicate information between the Active Component and the Reserve Component while identifying and highlighting key differences between the AC and RC.

Chapter 1 Proponent Notes, Chapter 2 Duties and Chapter 3 Transformation, were rewritten to update terminology, organizations and incorporate current Joint, Army and Psychological Operations doctrine with a focus on the transition to Multi-Domain Operations and great power competition.

Chapter 4, Recommended Career Management Self Development by rank, received the greatest degree of change in order to update legacy information with current Army self-development resources, validated and updated obsolete references and hyperlinks throughout the chapter, updated the recommended professional reading lists and reorganized proponent guidance to be aligned with current Army evaluation and promotion processes. Significant updates were also made to Chapter 5, Military Occupational Specialty 37F Psychological Operations Specialist, including: self-development guidance, Additional Skill Identifiers and Special Qualification Identifiers and revised special assignments including expanded broadening and MOS enhancing positions by grade. Additionally, the PSYOP Proponent office added an additional chapter, Chapter 7, Military Occupational Specialty Reserve Component to address key developmental differences between the AC and RC, this new chapter includes identifying RC specific requirements for highly and most qualified NCOs and identified key and developmental positions for USAR NCOs within PSYOP.

The updated PSYOP (CMF 37) Career Progression Plan was approved and published on Sept. 18, 2020, it can be found on the milsuite page or at the following link: **www.milsuite.mil/book/groups/smartbook-da-pam-600-25**

The Professional Development Model), based on the update Career Progression plan can be found on the U.S. Army Career Tracker website at: **https://actnow.army.mil**

CIVIL AFFAIRS

DA Pam 600-25, Updates for CMF 37 and 38

From the wide-open desert of the Sahara to the narrow streets of Vilnius, the entire world is amidst great change. A change in the way we live and work, a change in the environments where we conduct our business, a change in how we engage with others, but most importantly, a change in how the threats to our great nation operate. To counter those threats, the Army is adapting to the changing environment to fight and win the nation's wars. While the Army focuses on Large Scale Combat Operations, it hasn't shifted away from the importance of asymmetric warfare; proven by the addition of the Special Operations warfighting function.

While the Army and Special Operations are going through their own changes, the Civil Affairs branch is making sweeping changes of its own. FM 3-57 (*Civil Affairs Operations*) is under urgent revision to provide the Army with the foundation upon which to build an enduring governance capability to assist those nations where the Army operates throughout the competition and conflict spectrum — this includes both Large Scale Combat Operations and Special Operations. Proposals for additional MOSs and AOCs are at the Pentagon, giving the Army and Joint Force an enhanced capability to support governance during competition, enable governance during conflict, and return governance to the host nation during stability operations.

Even policies involving Civil Affairs have gone through major changes. However, wars are not fought, won and lost in the quagmire of procedure. Rather, they are won by the Soldiers who employ the tools at their disposal. Arming Soldiers with the foundational knowledge for success both on and off the battlefield is paramount to retaining quality Soldiers. It is with this mindset that changes were made to the Civil Affairs chapter of the NCO Professional Development Guide (DA PAM 600-25: **https://www.milsuite.mil/book/docs/DOC-871784**).

Self-development is a necessary tool for the Civil Affairs Soldier. As population dynamics constantly change, CA Soldiers must adapt to their environment; they must be capable of finding resources to better understand others and themselves, and also must show initiative to always do and be a better Soldier and person. Chapter 3 is the heart of the CA chapter in DA PAM 600-25: delivered in general guidance covering everything from physical fitness to professional reading, as well as specific guidance within those areas broken down by rank. Chapter 3 has undergone a massive overhaul that gives every Soldier in the CA branch the foundation on which to build their chosen craft.

The development overhaul isn't limited to Chapter 3, however. To truly capture individual career development and ensure the CA branch retains the highest quality Soldier, a difficult but necessary revamp of the development goals by rank was required. Contained in Chapter 4, each rank has a list of available assignments, military courses, civilian education recommendations; as well as differentiating the most qualified Soldier including requirements for Key Developmental assignments, NCOERs, ACFT scores, language scores, and functional training (SERE-C, Ranger, etc.). The breakdown provides a set of expectations for each NCO and provides promotion board members with an understanding of the performance and potential of each NCO.

Every Soldier is expected to be an expert in their craft, and Civil Affairs is no different. At every rank, each CA Soldier is armed with the training and education necessary to progress in their career and provide the capability to lead and win in every operating environment.

FROM THE
USASOC COMMANDER

The highly trained Men and Women of Army Special Operations are trusted to serve in ambiguous environments on behalf of our nation. Through this trust, we empower our people to make complex decisions that often have strategic implications. **We do not take the nation's trust lightly.**

In this timely article, Doctors Spradley, Gruters and Kent examine the psychology of why individuals in our ranks may struggle with ethical decision making in uncertain situations. Importantly, they also highlight the lesser known risks of moral injury and ethical drift, which can occur after a complex ethical decision is made. Their empirical work is informed by direct engagement with our Soldiers, and their recommendations are thoughtful, actionable and relevant. Engaged leaders and thoughtful leadership, the authors note, set the tone for ethical behavior in our formations.

In Army Special Operations we value our responsibility to care for our Men and Women — **our people are our priority.** We will continue to invest in their moral and ethical development, and Army Special Operations Forces around the world will continue to exemplify our proud legacy of excellence and professionalism. Thank you to Doctors Spradley, Gruters, and Kent for this valuable contribution to a discussion-worthy issue.

FRANCIS M. BEAUDETTE
Lieutenant General, United States Army Commanding

ETHICS
IN U.S. ARMY SPECIAL OPERATIONS

By Katherine Spradley, DBA,[1] Kurtis Gruters, Ph.D.,[1,2] and Luanne Kent, Psy.D.,[1] U.S. Army Special Operations Command

DECISION MAKING, DEVIANCE AND TRAINING

"**Professionals are guided by their ethic; the set of principles by which they practice, in the right way, on behalf of those they serve — demonstrating their character. This is their identity. Likewise, as Army professionals, we perform our duty according to our ethic. Doing so reinforces trust within the profession and with the American people.**"

— This statement, by General Raymond T. Odierno, opened a white paper by the Center for the Army Profession and Ethic (CAPE)[3] written to define the United States Army ethic. At the time of its writing, the authors stated that "there was no single document that existed that identified and defined the Army Ethics."[4] The paper defines the Army ethic with three charges to the service member: to be Honorable Servants of the Nation (professionals of character); Military Experts (competent professionals); and Stewards of the Army Profession (committed professionals).

The term "ethics" is understood colloquially to be a code of acceptable and generally moral conduct in personal and professional life. The specifics vary based on profession and culture, and often serve as a matter of risk mitigation within a profession. For example, medical professionals follow a code of conduct to protect the safety of their patients and build trust in the medical profession. Likewise, the U.S. Army as an institution believes that ethical behav-

PART ONE
ETHICS, MORALS, AND VALUES

What are they and why do they go wrong?

IN A DYNAMIC AND COMPLEX ENVIRONMENT

This document is broken into two sections. This first section will establish a common understanding of what we mean when we discuss ethics, morals, and values; consider the inherent ethicality of ARSOF personnel; and discuss some of the challenges to ethical and moral decision making that ARSOF personnel face.

1.1 – Defining ethics, morals and values.

The terms ethics, morals and values are often used interchangeably; however, although closely related, they are each importantly unique. To appreciate their relationship to each other, we first establish our working definition of each term then consider how these concepts interact to build the foundation of an organizational ethic.

We consider ethics to be the agreed upon guiding behavioral principles, formal or otherwise, of any group that are both shaped by and help to shape the nature of that group. They may be dictated by a formal body within that group or arise organically from the shared morals and values of group members. They set the behavioral standard for group members and formalize the group's values. Upon entering a profession, an individual agrees, explicitly or otherwise, to adhere to the ethical standards and conduct of the profession. An individual must be educated on the organization's ethics and ethical decision-making process.

Morals are an individual's standards of behavior and beliefs concerning what is and is not acceptable. Morals can vary considerably according to background, culture and upbringing.

Importantly, morals are personal while ethics are driven by a group or profession. Each individual has a moral identity which, having developed primarily through childhood experience, is more rigid in adult life but still subject to change in relatively extreme circumstances and experiences. One's moral self-image drives personal decision making: it tunes an individual's moral "True North" so that person might identify right from wrong, and determines the willingness to follow that compass particularly when there is pressure to do otherwise.

Finally, **we define values as an individual's hierarchical belief structure of what concepts and**

ior is essential to the profession of armed conflict to ensure that war serves a very specific purpose rather than devolving into chaotic destruction and killing. This belief is intended to guide all aspects of military behavior, policy, decision making and application of land power under civilian authority In short, "military ethics are a broad set of codes and standards, both written and understood, that military members are expected to uphold."[06]

Despite this conviction, the CAPE definition of the Army ethic is not widely taught to or known by the force. In fact, we struggled, for some time, to simply find it. Consequently, the Army still lacks a single clear and agreed upon code of ethics like that found in other organizations and professions. For example, both the American Medical Association and the American Psychology Association publish a code of ethics that govern practice of licensed professionals in these fields. Such a document does not exist within the military, and several high-profile violations of military ethics have caused Army and other military leaders to ask if more can be done to foster ethical behavior at all levels of the military.

In this document, we do not attempt to broadly define the Army ethic. Instead, we discuss some of the reasons that fundamentally good people make unethical and immoral decisions, or totally disengage, in war. We then make some recommendations about how this may be addressed by the shared responsibility and team work of military leaders, Soldiers, and service providers — including doctors, psychologists, social workers, chaplains, etc. We write this from the lens of U.S. Army Special Operations Forces, but believe the discussion generally holds true for the entire Army and broader military with some minor modifications.

We do not claim to have stumbled on a silver bullet to fix human behavior, but we hope to remind the force of the need for ongoing training and dialogue, the shared responsibility to the Army Team, and the need to always strive to improve the organization.

War is full of moral and ethical challenges, particularly when the nature of the conflict is itself ambiguous. Since Vietnam, the conflicts experienced by the U.S. Army have not been straightforward.

conduct are more or less important, dependent on context. When circumstances allow alignment of ethics, morals and values, it is easy to determine the correct behavior (even if it may still be difficult to act on that determination). In this case, these three principles are effectively the same and may be used interchangeably.

Circumstances often require an individual to choose between one's own moral priorities, organizational ethical priorities or some combination thereof. In cases of conflict between competing moral and ethical priorities, one's values provide the framework to resolve the conflict. Examples of such conflict include insider attacks where, for example, an individual like Edward Snowden chooses to follow his own moral compass over their organizational ethics when the two are severely misaligned. In other cases, all moral and ethical regulatory systems collapse. In 2008, Detert, Teviño and Sweitzer define this moral (or ethical) disengagement as "unethical decisions [made] when moral self-regulatory processes that normally inhibit unethical behavior are deactivated via use of several interrelated cognitive mechanisms…"[07]

By understanding the interactions of ethics, morals, and values, we can begin to disentangle the reasons individuals violate these codes and arm in-

dividuals with the tools to achieve the best possible resolution to conflicts as they arise.

1.2 – Ethics and moral injury within ARSOF.

War is full of moral and ethical challenges, particularly when the nature of the conflict is itself ambiguous. Since Vietnam, the conflicts experienced by the U.S. Army have not been straightforward. This is the space in which Army Special Operations Forces including the Green Berets and Army Rangers, operate, typically working closely with regional partner forces under substantial autonomy and minimal guidance. This tendency to work "away from the flagpole" minimizes leadership guidance and oversight, placing considerable responsibility on the operators to maintain ethical standards in sub-optimal conditions. The ability to effectively navigate this ethically and morally complex space is essential to the survival and success of ARSOF operators, their local partner forces and the local populace.

ARSOF is a diverse force of volunteers selected from within the conventional Army's own ranks, other components of the military and the civilian population. Selection into these units involves rigorous physical and psychological testing, as well as assessment of candidate's ethical and moral standards. The selection process and subsequent training challenge a Soldier's Army Values and Warrior Ethos as well as the ARSOF eight core attributes (Integrity, Courage, Perseverance, Personal Responsibility, Professionalism, Adaptability, Team Player and Capability). These attributes define an ethical framework for ARSOF personnel and assessment does not stop after initial training. Ongoing assessments by peers and leaders maintain intense scrutiny on the ethical and moral behavior of the active force. Why, then, do some ARSOF personnel disregard their ethical and moral self-regulation and engage in poor decision making?

ARSOF operators are often put in ethical and moral lose-lose situations above and beyond the typical challenges of war. Social theory states that a person weighs the risks, including moral costs, and benefits of actions when making individual decisions.[08,09] ARSOF personnel routinely report situations in which all options incur a moral debt: the moral costs outweigh the moral benefits. An example routinely cited is the moral cost of supporting a local militia leader to accomplish the combat mission when that leader is violating the basic human rights of his people. Furthermore, due to the autonomous nature of ARSOF activity, there is often little ability to place the moral burden of these decisions on leadership; it is borne by that operator and the immediate team. These personnel are specifically selected to be highly moral and ethical individuals, and each of these decisions is a moral injury. Coping with regular moral injury is a non-trivial task.

A natural coping technique is to reduce the moral cost of an action to make it seem more allowable to that individual. By reducing the moral cost, an otherwise morally upright person maintains a positive self-perception and avoids self-censure when engaging in a morally ambiguous behavior. This technique applied in the extreme, called moral disengagement,[10] can become habitual and drive a persistent shift in ethical decision making.

Various methods exist to reduce moral burden of an action. Euphemistic labeling puts a positive spin on a negative action. For example, the terms "friendly fire" or "collateral damage" reframe hitting unintended targets in a way to reduce the negative association. Moral justification is portraying inhumane behavior as morally correct to make it socially acceptable. This has occurred in a series of recent highly publicized cases of SOF operators justifying non-combat killings. Ethical fading rationalizes unethical behaviors by incrementally shifting the boundary of acceptable behavior. Examples include "it isn't really stealing because it is petty cash," "cheating is okay if you already know the material" or "they killed one of us so revenge is expected." All of these examples demonstrate techniques to cope with ambiguous behavior. However, they also all highlight a more important truth: that warfighters are routinely placed in situations where moral injury is a common occurrence. Despite this, there is little guidance or training on how to minimize or cope with these injuries.

1.3 – Four levels of ethical risk for ARSOF personnel.

Not all unethical decisions are equal. We consider there to be four distinct categories of unethical decision making. Each category indicates different levels of risk to the individual and organization, and requires a different approach to address.

In the first category are poor decisions made at the speed of combat in a complex environment. Individuals who make these mistakes recognize and acknowledge the error. We argue that this is not a flaw in their ethics, but rather a flaw in training the decision-making process to work quickly and effectively under stress. However, it must be emphasized that we use the term "mistake" lightly here, as often these decisions are made in a lose-lose situation with no correct answer, even if the decision were to be made without time constraint.

Unfortunately, these sorts of cases are likely to cause the most severe moral injury, as the decision maker, whether right or wrong in action, understands and must deal with the consequences of that decision. We discuss how to minimize the impact of these sorts of decisions later, but they are a fact of war. Training on how to optimize and cope with these decisions is essential, as is leadership support for decisions made in good faith under stress.

The second category consists of deliberate decisions validated with an inappropriate values hierarchy. Individuals in this category may be generally ethical in routine behavior, but have misaligned moral and ethical priorities. Examples in this category include the moral-based insider attack or the vigilante. For example, someone who kills a presumed enemy leader outside of combat, ostensibly weighing the value of protecting the mission over that of committing murder. This individual may understand the complexity of the situation and that their choice was not in line with the organizational ethic, but they likely fail to grasp the severity of their decision. Targeted training of the organizational ethic, particularly emphasizing the why of the training, must be designed to bring the individual values back in line with organizational values.

The third category contains those cases where the individual's moral and ethical regulatory systems have been compromised through repeated stress and injury. This may manifest as an inability to tell right from wrong entirely, or an inability to act according to the knowledge of right and wrong. In these cases, a deep and persistent shift in behavior has occurred. This person is likely on the verge of or in the midst of a broader psychological injury, and should generally be considered combat ineffective and given appropriate treatment.

The final category are those indefensible immoral and unethical decisions made by a fundamentally flawed human. This person is a criminal who has yet to be arrested, but has managed to con his or her way into this profession. While we have checks to prevent this and such a person is rare, some will inevitably be able to hide their nature long enough to infiltrate the organization. Minimizing behavioral health waivers for at-risk individuals, and providing rapid off-ramps for those who are detected is necessary to preserve the health of the organization.

1.4 – Impacts of cultural environment.

Culture has a substantial impact on an individual's decision making. Three levels of culture are considered particularly relevant to this document: **1) Macro-culture** is the broader culture to which one belongs, such as one's society, group or battalion. **2) Micro-culture** is one's immediate sphere of routine interaction, such as the team or family. **3) Exo-culture** is a culture of routine interaction outside of the primary micro-culture(s) of an individual; this may include a social club or sports team, but equally relevant in modern society, this includes online forums, chat rooms, gaming and social networks, etc.

These three levels of culture each exert influence on an individual's behavior in various ways. Robert Cialdini's 6 Principles of Persuasion[11] provide an effective framework to consider how each level is expected to impact an individual. Under this framework, the macro-culture influences the behavior of

ARSOF CORE ATTRIBUTES

1
Integrity

2
Courage

3
Perseverance

4
Personal Responsibility

5
Professionalism

6
Adaptability

7
Team Player

8
Capability

PRINCIPLES OF INFLUENCE

These six principles of influence can drive an individual to go against their moral standards or the broader ethics of their organization.

1

Reciprocity

2

Authority

3

Consistency

4

Liking

5

Social Proof

6

Scarity
or
Exclusivity

an individual through the actions and commands of that culture's authority figures and through the consensus behavior of individuals within the organization (or, the tendency for individuals in an organization to behave generally like each other). In a positive macro-environment, this provides the safety and appropriate tools to cope with psychological challenges, while the reverse is true in a negative culture. Overall, the macro-culture is less personal and therefore has less direct impact on one's behavior.[12]

Both the micro- and exo-cultures engage an individual on a deeply personal level and can substantially influence behavior for good or bad. The degree of influence is based in part on the level of engagement and belonging one feels to either culture. **Both micro- and exo-culture are subject to multiple influence principles: reciprocity, authority, consistency, liking, social proof and scarcity or exclusivity.**[13]

These six principles of influence can drive an individual to go against their moral standards or the broader ethics of their organization. In a negative team micro-culture, an individual may follow orders (principle of authority) or engage in behaviors in order to maintain status in the group (principle of social proof). If the group drifts off course, the individual may be inclined to follow so that he/she is not ostracized (principle of liking). There is also a greater tendency to grant favors to (principle of reciprocity), and follow the influence of (principle of consistency), the immediate group micro-culture before the broader macro-culture. Finally, initiation and hazing rituals may be adopted to promote an elite atmosphere around the micro- culture (principle of scarcity).

Micro-cultures outside of work, particularly one's family and home life, carry similar influence. Family is a substantial driver in moral beliefs, and while a strong moral foundation will typically support ethical behavior, misaligned convictions may override ethical standards if the two are in conflict. Family can also be a source of stress and fatigue; while this is certainly true in an unhealthy home life, it can also be true in a healthy home. Stress and fatigue, subsequently, can result in a reduced ability to properly assess the moral and ethical implications of an action.

However, friends, family and spiritual support can also offer a stabilizing effect, particularly in recovery from moral injury.[14]

Exo-culture is becoming particularly influential in the modern era of the internet, where one may easily find camaraderie in a group of like-minded digital friends. Online social interactions have been shown to be typically narrow in focus and often hypercritical of dissenting views.[15] This invites someone with more extreme views to find comfort and safety in an exo-culture, risking rejection of an otherwise healthy micro-culture. The internet's anonymous nature allows a person to make comments that would be rejected by a healthy culture with no attribution. Such comments can be "liked" or endorsed, emboldening that individual towards making further such statements or finding a group of individuals with similar views.

Once found, an unhealthy exo-culture will typically function as an "echo-chamber," discouraging dissenting views and risking radicalization of existing views, depending on the nature of the exo-culture. It also places the individual at risk for social engineering, which may be intentional or simply occur naturally through exposure to perceived authority, consensus, consistency, reciprocity and liking. The exo-culture further becomes a commodity through scarcity, where time in this space provides an escape from typical daily life, including one's (potentially healthy) micro-culture. This sets up a risk that the individual may come to see relationships within this exo-culture as more valued, authority as stronger and consistency as more important than they otherwise would be in a micro-culture interaction.

Collectively, exo-cultures have a disproportionate ability to disrupt unit cohesion and moral decision making. While online interaction is not inherently bad, it allows us to bypass many of the inter-personal checks and balances that we as social creatures typically use to maintain healthy and productive micro-cultures. The pervasiveness of internet exo-cultures makes it effectively impossible to limit engagement. At the same time, the risk to culture and individual cannot be ignored and should factor into any discussion on broader solutions to ethical decision making in the same way the digital domain has changed the face of modern warfare.

The interaction of these levels of culture and the individual make any one-size-fits-all solution to ethical diagnosis and training infeasible. Instead, a more appropriate option is to consider what can be done by leadership to help shape the cultural environment, by the individual to help minimize moral injury and inappropriate influence of exo- and micro-cultures, and by service providers to support healthy cultures and personnel within ARSOF.

Family is a substantial driver in moral beliefs, and while a strong moral foundation will typically support ethical behavior, misaligned convictions may override ethical standards if the two are in conflict.

PART TWO

Recommendations for optimizing ethical decision making

The first section of this paper established a common understanding of ethics, morals, and values; suggested that ARSOF personnel are fundamentally ethical people who undergo continuous assessment of moral character; and considered some key factors that can lead to unethical and immoral decisions. We also noted the lack of a broadly known and practiced definition of the Army ethic; that we do not have enough specific and relevant training for operators to learn how to address ethically complex situations; and that we lack a decisive method for detecting and treating moral injury.

The second section of this paper seeks to address some of these challenges. We do not expect these recommendations are a complete solution. Instead, we hope that they will begin action and routine dialogue that moves us steadily in the right direction and equips operators at all levels with tools to minimize ethical and moral trauma. This will, we believe, result in positive improvement for the operators as humans, their families, ARSOF and the Army as a whole. We focus separately on the roles of the leadership, the individual, and the service providers to achieve this goal.

2.1 – Ethical culture starts at the top.

A recent review of ethics in SOF across the Command concluded that USSOCOM does not have a systemic ethics problem. However, the review team did find that in some cases "USSOCOM's cultural focus on SOF employment and mission accomplishment is to the detriment of leadership, discipline and accountability." Although ethics is an institutional agreement, it begins with the organization's leadership at all levels.

At both the macro- and micro-culture levels, leadership sets the tone and demonstrates ethical standards. Leadership is best able to model, articulate, and maintain the Army ethic. Shu, Mazar, Gino, Ariely, and Bazerman[16] and other similar studies have reported consistent ethical and moral performance when leadership is proactive with affirming ethical decision making prior to an event. It is, therefore, imperative that leaders "provide purpose, direction, and motivation to accomplish the mission and improve the organization."[17] Stated simply, leadership is not about being in charge but rather taking care of those in your charge. Leadership at all levels should continue to

hold each other and themselves to this standard, and challenge each other to lead by example.

Maintaining standards, particularly when it is difficult to do so, goes beyond the immediate action. Although immediate consequences of unethical behavior can be swift and obvious, often times the second and third order effects are far reaching. The impact of broken trust takes its toll on teams, Soldiers, mission readiness, other leaders, and the public. Major problematic events are typically preceded by a series of minor events, and failure to account for these "stepping stone" events can establish an environment that fosters significant breaches of ethical behavior. While there is a tendency to "police our own," failures in accountability diminish the importance of the moral decision-making process and allow ethical drift. Without accountability and an appropriate spectrum of punishment, this erosion of ethical standards becomes habitual and can go undetected so long that it snowballs into a major event. Practically, this means continuing the tradition of maintaining standards, having the courage to speak up when something is wrong, and encouraging subordinates to do the same.

By contrast, there is an expectation to model ethical behavior at all times, such that success in this regard is unremarkable and goes unnoticed. While ethical behavior must be the norm, incentivizing appropriate ethical behavior can increase the tendency toward positive moral decisions, particularly when weighing the options in a morally ambiguous situation. Both rewards and consequences should be transparent, communicated and of sufficient magnitude to increase the likelihood of individuals acting in an ethical manner.

It is assumed that our leaders have impeccable ethical and moral standards but that does not mean they should meet ethical challenges alone, particularly given their disproportionate impact on the ethical standards of the community. ARSOF personnel have substantial experience in ethical decision making in complex scenarios. Sharing this knowledge, whether in a formal or informal setting, can help other leaders navigate similar scenarios and reinforce ethical values in a safe environment for leader-peers. Ultimately, fostering a sense of ethical and moral safety is a leader's responsibility. This sets the necessary tone of responsibility and motivation to take moral action even when faced with adversity.[18]

2.2 – Detecting ethical drift.

At the individual level, detecting unhealthy ethical or moral behavior is essential to maximizing the likelihood of successfully correcting the issue, both for the individual and the organization. Early detection during assessment and selection for ARSOF is the first step in protecting the ethical health of our culture. This is particularly important for preventing the previously discussed fourth category of unethical decision makers: those who have no place in

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16. Shu, Mazar, Gino, Ariely, and Bazerman. "Signing at the Beginning Makes Ethics Salient and Decreases Dishonest Self-reports in Comparison to Signing at the End." *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America* 109, no. 38 (September 18, 2012): 15197–15200. http://search.proquest.com/docview/104121244 **17.** iBid, 11. **18.** Hannah, Avolio, and May. "Moral Maturation and Moral Conation: A Capacity." *Academy of Management. The Academy of Management Review* 36, no. 4 (October 1, 2011): 663–685. http://search.proquest.com/docview/898862040/ **19.** Löckenhoff, Terracciano, Patriciu, Eaton, and Costa. (2009). "Self-reported Extremely Adverse Life Events and Longitudinal Changes in Five-factor Model Personality Traits in an Urban Sample." *Journal of Traumatic Stress* 22, no. 1 (February 2009): 53–59. **20.** Verschoor, Curtis. "Ethical Challenges in the Workplace Persist." *Strategic Finance* 100, no. 5 (November 1, 2018): 23–24. http://search.proquest.com/docview/2131574340/ **21.** iBid. **22.** Gentile, Mary C. *Educating for Values-Driven Leadership: Giving Voice to Values Across the Curriculum,* 2013. **23.** Gentile, Mary C. "Giving Voice to Values: A Pedagogy for Behavioral Ethics." *Journal of Management Education* 41, no. 4 (August 2017): 469–479. http://search.proquest.com/docview/1911718044/

our organization. After selection, the entire force must support each other in detecting and fixing ethical drift, defined as a persistent pattern of ethically inappropriate decisions that deviate from an otherwise ethical baseline.

Detecting a shift can be difficult. Psychological testing can help to a point. Five factor personality tests are currently used throughout the ARSOF pipeline to measure personality traits like compliance, altruism, modesty and confidence. Scores on these tests can change over time due to a number of factors, including moral injury, life threatening events, maturity, and medical issues including traumatic brain injury and post-traumatic stress.[19] Other tests are currently being developed, tested, and researched that would help identify individuals prone to ethical disengagement by assessing emotional traits instead of emotional states through scenario-based measures and common reactions.

Still, direct testing for ethical drift tends to be difficult. In such tests, the "correct" answers tend to be obvious and measure what someone thinks they should say rather than their true beliefs. Instead, peer report tends to be a strong indicator so long as the environment enables honest reporting and there exists a shared goal of ethical behavior. However, peer reports can still be powerful in an unhealthy environment. The Association of Certified Fraud Examiners report that whistleblowing is the best method for detecting ethical disengagement.[20] In this context, whistleblowing is about protecting the ethical and mental health of one's peers, as well as that of the unit. This is targeted generally at those individual's in categories two (whose personal morals are misaligned with organizational ethics) and three (who are becoming ethically disengaged) to make sure they receive the support they need to be guided back on track. As noted previously, leadership sets the environment for honest feedback and reporting. The fear of retaliation undermines the efficacy of peer report, so leadership must be able and willing to protect anonymity in reporting ethical disengagement.[21]

By creating an atmosphere of peer support, vigilance, and willingness to protect the integrity of the force, ARSOF can continue to improve on a culture of ethical behavior. However, it is best to prevent individual ethical drift in the first place.

2.3 – The ARSOF operator's R.O.L.E.

Reducing risk factors for ethical drift and moral injury can minimize the potential for negative impact on the individual and culture. One way to minimize the moral cost of an action is to ensure that it was the best action that could have been taken at that time. A deliberate choice on a complex ethical question allows the decision maker to put some of the moral cost of the decision on other entities such as the mission, circumstance, etc., and thereby avoid shouldering the entire burden alone. It also minimizes "what-if" questions that can amplify guilt after the fact. This is particularly important for the moral health of that first category of decision makers: those made quickly under stress but with the correct intentions and values.

ARSOF operators often do not have the luxury of a drawn-out deliberation process like the Military Decision Making Process. A more field expedient framework like the "four-bin," or ROLE, analysis is often more effective in a time-constrained situation. **The acronym ROLE outlines a quick process for assessing four key questions about an ethical challenge: Risk management, Operational impact, Legal implications and Ethical agreements.**

Each component of ROLE lays out a critical dimension of a given decision, and none of the four aspects of ROLE should be viewed in isolation; they depend on each other. Risk management considers the safety of the decision maker, the team and other personnel the decision may impact. Operational impact assesses how the decision directly affects the mission, including second and third order effects. Legal implications consider local, U.S., and Uniformed Code of Military Justice law, for those that are involved in the mission, the Army and the nation. Finally, Ethical agreements reminds each operator of the ARSOF attributes, Army values and other ethical standards of our profession. Considered under these categories, the operator may ask what their ROLE is in making some decision and quickly compare a set of competing options.

Training for ROLE-based decision making must address each of the four components, giving a general knowledge of the considerations and material governing each component. The individual need not be an expert in these areas, but must have sufficient relevant knowledge or access to such knowledge.

Deliberate practice with discussion and feedback would solidify and deepen this knowledge, speed up the decision-making process, and instill confidence in decision making under complexity. This could be particularly powerful if incorporated into after action reviews and leader-peer discussions, providing a common language and frame of reference for operators to discuss ethical considerations for recent events and missions. Moreover, education, scenario ROLE play, and discussion in a safe environment can form an understanding of when and why to emphasize each of the four aspects over another when they are in conflict.

2.4 – Service provider supporting efforts

We have discussed how leadership should support a safe atmosphere encouraging candid feedback and, when necessary, a willingness to report concerning behavior for the good of the individual and unit. We have also discussed the value of deliberately training and utilizing the ROLE framework to consider and reflect on ethical challenges. We turn now to the role of the service provider in supporting a culture of ethics and moral health.

ARSOF consists of some of the most elite Soldiers in the military. However, there is tacit cultural attitude that these operators do not need the same level of oversight and care as conventional Soldiers. In fact, the exact opposite is true. Because of their skills, ARSOF operators are asked to do more and are put in more difficult situations than most other military personnel. They should be given a greater degree of leadership, care and oversight commensurate to what their country asks of them in order to protect their health, wellbeing, and moral self-image.

Operators continue to report stigma or negative attitudes after seeking medical, psychological or behavioral support. This perception reduces use of available resources and can lead to increased negativity, anxiety, reduced job satisfactionand "self-treatment" all resulting in decreased ethical decision-making abilities. Furthermore, it can lead to isolation, driving operators toward self-destructive behaviors such as routine drinking, self-medicating or seeking support in potentially damaging exo-cultures. Giving unfettered and non-stigmatized access to physicians, psychologists, chaplains, social workers and other professionals can give an operator more resilience and coping skills, reduced negativity and stress, and a healthier home life.

It is incumbent on service providers to advocate for the Soldiers, to engage with leadership, and to minimize barriers to service utilization. Often, a "foot-in-the-door" approach is enough to have an operator open up about a traumatic event, allowing appropriate actions to be taken in care of the Soldier. Providers who take care to interact with and gain the trust of their Soldiers, open opportunities for discreet discussion, or simply find ways to make their services known have generally reported successful mental and emotional healthcare outcomes.

2.5 – Recommendation for expanded ethical training

Ethical reinforcement through education, including rehearsal, can strengthen the moral self-image and ethical decision-making process by "appealing to a sense of purpose and building a skill-based confidence and moral competence."[22] Education also serves to make clear the explicit ethical guidelines of the community and the acceptable range of ethical interpretation in complex situations, and it acts as a reminder to behave within the agreed upon ethical standards. This act of reminding an individual of their commitment to their ethical standards may be enough to eliminate a substantial degree of ethical drift and to help realign moral and ethical priorities.

The best way to teach something is to consult the subject-matter expert, make it applicable to the audience you are trying to reach, and include multiple opportunities to build confidence in the new skill with a rehearsal mindset. ARSOF training cadre are all experienced operators who have worked in ethically challenging situations. Collectively, they are highly capable of developing powerful and relevant scenarios that address how the conflict, fear and anxiety of a real mission may challenge ethical decision making. These scenarios can provide a structure with which to practice ROLE analysis as a decision-making tool. The exercises must be engaging, geared toward the above average intelligence of the SOF population, and provide cadre with learning outcomes and guidelines but also allow the freedom to personalize, develop and execute according to situational fit.

Since there are already so many demands put on operators' time, it is recommended that training be distributed across and incorporated into each phase of the training pipelines. Moreover, by incorporating this training and not creating it as a single course or add-on to another course, sufficient depth, retention and application of material can be achieved.[23] This consistent and relevant exposure to and rehearsal of ethical decision making and implementation will further exercise the SOF attributes and allow cadre and command to utilize their own experiences as examples to reinforce ethical and moral engagement. We recommend that such a course of study be designed and led by current cadre alongside providers of mental, spiritual and social health.

While the active force would also certainly benefit from a similar course, the time demands may make this infeasible. Instead, we recommend that scenario-based ethical discussion be deliberately incorporated into after action reviews for training and real-world missions. Short, routine discussions will keep these principles fresh and active in the operators' minds. Incorporating service providers into these discussions when possible is encouraged to incorporate outside expertise and perspective.

CONCLUSION

War is arguably the most ethically complex of all human endeavors. The U.S. Army has, for its entire existence, put Soldiers in the way of not just physical harm, but mental and emotional harm. This is a reality of the profession, and one that is understood by those who volunteer; however, it also means the Army has an obligation to minimize the risk of moral and emotional injury. For ARSOF, it is through the shared effort of leadership, the operators and service providers that this risk mitigation occurs. This shared obligation and a willingness to support each other as brothers and sisters will help us understand and live our ethic, provide the tools to minimize moral injury, and to recover from injury when it occurs. Because ours is an organization dedicated to living in the gray, that shared ethical foundation is all the more important. It is how we win our fight, accomplish our mission, and return home to the nation we serve and the ones we love.

SOF PERSPECTIVES
on Fighting ISIS in Syria

BY MAJOR GENERAL PATRICK B. ROBERSON

01

As the Army realigns and modernizes its capabilities for Great Power Competition, Multi-Domain Operations and Large-Scale Ground Combat Operations, it could be easy to dismiss Operation Inherent Resolve's relevance to the evolving strategic context. Yet, if history provides us any indication of the future, the military will be asked to do more with less. Near-peer adversary competition with conventional military capabilities will be expected, while combat operations, albeit limited in scope, will continue through hybrid and proxy warfare as *great powers* compete to expand their influence. Moreover, joint special operation forces and coalition forces operated in Syria against Islamic State in Iraq and Syria while simultaneously navigating forces and proxies from our Russian and Iranian adversaries. The experience in Syria provides an excellent example of what GPC could look like in the future. Special operations forces were integral to the defeat of ISIS in Syria and will remain in high demand as conflicts escalate in places where indigenous partner goals align with U.S. objectives. Syria presents a model where special operations engaged across multiple domains to defeat the enemy using partners, technology and a small footprint approach.

At the height of ISIS's territorial control, the group held 110,000 square kilometers in Iraq and Syria. In 2018 to 2019, Special Operations Joint Task Force-OIR's mission was clear — the permanent defeat of the physical caliphate. By March 23, 2019, the Syrian Democratic Forces, supported by the Global Coalition, fought aggressively to liberate ISIS's last stronghold in Baghouz, Syria, directly east of the Euphrates River along the Syrian-Iraqi Border. In the aftermath, a Global Coalition and its local partners had liberated nearly eight million people from ISIS's Control. Reflecting on the lessons SOF learned in Syria, the U.S. should consider special warfare as a viable option for scalable employment in Great Power Competition.

SOF PARTNER-ENABLED COMBAT OPERATIONS

Finding the right indigenous partners is key

Army Special Operation's greatest competitive advantage is our ability to transform indigenous will and capacity into combat power – through partnering. In Syria, national policy did not allow for a large military footprint. So, in late 2015, the Special Operations Command deployed the first Special Operations Forces to forge alliances with the indigenous forces in Syria who would form the coalition to fight ISIS. Although it was a long

and sometimes tortuous route to arrive at, the U.S. built and partnered with the best force we could hope for. The difficulty was largely due to strained relations between our partners and our Turkish allies as well as internal relationships between Syrian and Iraqi Kurds and their Arab countrymen. Our success in Syria was directly related to the quality of our indigenous partners. In its last incarnation, the Syrian Democratic Forces were a far more formidable force, in every way, than the core army that ISIS could field.

The ability to transform indigenous will, movements and groups into fighting formations is unique to Special Operations Forces. While other elements of the Joint Force can advise and assist foreign military and para-military formations, SOF has the capability to provide structure, organization, training and advisory support to entities that lack fundamental military characteristics. In Syria, we fortified the organic logistics and sustainment methods of the SDF, provided equipment, planned and executed their entry-level training programs and enabled them on the battlefield with joint fires. Not only did these efforts give the SDF the organization and structure required to fight and win against ISIS, but they also inspired organic learning and development. For example, the employment of a U.S.-led fire support plan for SDF offensive operations forced the partners to develop, organically, corresponding maneuver plans.

Forming the right coalition of indigenous partners is extremely complex. Some of the many requirements for success include a nuanced understanding of culture, his-

<div style="text-align:right">02</div>

tory, politics, warfighting capabilities, tribal allegiances and socioeconomics, along with local, national, and regional dynamics. In our quest to find the best partners in Syria there was trial and error; we determined that some indigenous partners were more concerned with fighting, while others, namely the local opposition forces in Syria and Iraq, were hyper locally focused. The operating environment was rife with internal divisions, disagreements and historical rivalries that required constant tending. In effect, conflicting interests often presented U.S. SOF with greater operational risk to employ local militias outside their sectors of interest.

The Arm of Indigenous Maneuver — Syrian Democratic Forces

Indigenous forces organized around tribal identities are an integral part of the SOF approach to war. However, we should recognize their limitations and develop mitigating strategies to enable accomplishment of U.S. military objectives. In Syria, tribal groups had little interest in fighting in areas that transcended their tribal areas. Tribal militias were best employed for localized, smaller-scale operations because leaders were reluctant to commit the entire tribe for operations beyond their areas of responsibility.

The SDF began as an umbrella organization comprised of Kurdish (mainly YPG) and Arab militias whose common denominator was that they were fighting against ISIS. With our assistance, this confederation of militias became increasingly successful. Ultimately, the

CONSIDERATIONS FOR SELECTING AND TRAINING PARTNER FORCES

Potential to create a unifying goal

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Organizational capabilities

....

Advisability and willingness to learn

....

Ability to govern and provide stability

....

Not tribally or regionally constrained

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A U.S. Soldier observes as partners from the Syrian Democratic Forces raise a flag over an outpost in Syria. U.S. ARMY PHOTO BY STAFF SGT. ANDREW GOEDL

02
A member of the U.S.-led Coalition works with a partner from a local Syrian security force to maintain security in northeast Syria. U.S. ARMY PHOTO BY STAFF SGT. ANDREW GOEDL

Yekîneyên Parastina Gel (YPG), which translates to the People's Protection Units, emerged as the most capable partner to conduct expeditionary offensive operations in Syria and form the backbone of the SDF. Their fighting capability, tenacity, democratic ideals, deep hatred for ISIS and aspirations for more autonomous governance were compatible with U.S. interests. Thus, the YPG served as the core organizational framework that provided the leadership and vision for the SDF. They established order in chaos by instilling the disparate Syrian militias with the confidence, motivation and collective will to organize and fight ISIS through creation of various power sharing agreements, compromise, and compensation.

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01, 02
Green Berets work with Syrian partner forces during an 81mm mortar assessment and training session at an outpost in southern Syria. U.S. ARMY PHOTOS BY STAFF SGT. WILLIAM HOWARD

03
U.S. Army Special Forces Soldiers work with Syrian partner forces in Syria to combat ISIS in the region. U.S. ARMY PHOTO

Indigenous Information Operations — SDF Media Cells

ISIS exploited the proliferation of social media to influence populations and gain an information advantage against the Global Coalition. Due to the lack of an SDF voice and overarching narrative framework, SOF Psychological Operations had to help the SDF develop a messaging apparatus from square one. Over time, this resulted in an indigenous information operations capability that could unilaterally conduct information operations.

While the debate on whether SOF should unilaterally message or message through partner forces is ongoing, a hybrid approach that relies more heavily on indigenous messaging is incredibly effective. Comprehensive understanding enables legitimate indigenous partners to create authentic and targeted messages that resonate better with local audiences. An early example where U.S. unilateral messaging fell short was our emphasis on ISIS's brutal tactics. Viewing ISIS's inhumane tactics through the lens of Western values caused us to overlook the fact that Arab culture viewed ferocity as strength. This was ISIS's value proposition. In effect, we not only amplified ISIS recruiting efforts, but further instilled fear within the population to produce the opposite intended effects. U.S. unilateral messaging lacked in comparison to ISIS's

information campaign for many reasons, but primarily due to our inability to match the tempo and quantity of their messaging as well as a lack of deep understanding vis-à-vis the population's complex identity.

Indigenous Governance — Syrian Civil Councils

The criticality of transitional governance cannot be overstated. As the SDF became more successful, it was crucial to garner legitimacy with regional and international leaders and ensure they were successful in filling the post-conflict governance vacuum. SOF Civil Affairs was instrumental in integrating military operations into the overall Global Coalition's efforts to establish transitional governance, particularly in Raqqa and Manbij. Even though the State Department's Syria Transition Assistance Response Team Forward teams were the overall lead agency, SOF CA teams really did the brunt of the groundwork. This was particularly true for recently liberated areas, which were inaccessible to many START implementing partners due to the security conditions.

SOF CA's partnership with the Raqqa and Manbij Civil Councils provided a successful local model to replicate and build upon. The existence of local councils allowed for the co-option of an organic governance model. Although imperfect, this form of governance provided a representative body to tackle all aspects of governance—de-mining prioritization, access to clean water, education and trash removal, just to name a few. Some critics argued that the civil councils used coercive tactics and were not truly representative because the Kurds had a great degree of control over who served on the initial councils. While these criticisms were warranted, it is worth noting in certain cases, especially in areas where loyalties to the

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caliphate remained strong, coercive tactics were appropriate to quickly establish civil control.

MISSION COMMAND BY, WITH AND THROUGH

SOF is inherently designed for command and control on noncontiguous battlefields. Technology and the character of war are pushing more command-and-control capabilities to lower levels; OIR employed unmanned weapons, sensor systems and strike cells at nearly every echelon. Specialized training, technology and equipment allows SOF to operate in austere and remote locations. In Northeast Syria, SOF command nodes made up for force protection shortfalls through partner force integration and technology. This was an expedient, economy-of-effort approach. However, SOF must continuously ensure that we fully understand our partners' loyalties in relation to our enemies and other partners to minimize operational risk.

Precision Targeting and Application of Joint Fires at Echelon

In Syria and Iraq, ISIS ascended to power and established a defendable territorial-Caliphate in the Middle Euphrates River Valley in part due to its successful acquisition of conventional weapons. ISIS fighters used fires to support armed formations and used the cover and concealment offered by urban areas for protection against U.S. and Coalition fires. Therefore, the U.S. and Coalition directed deliberate and dynamic joint-fires at ISIS leadership and infrastructure to degrade and ultimately defeat ISIS. Doing so required the full array of precision-fired munitions, from 120-mm mortars in support of SDF maneuver forces along the front line of troops employed by U.S. SOF and U.S. Marines, to air-to-ground AGM-

114 Hellfire missiles delivered from U.S. AH-64 Apaches flown by the Combat Aviation Brigade, to UGM-109 GPS guided Tomahawk Land Attack Missiles delivered from U.S. Navy Destroyers in the Mediterranean Sea. More than 15,000 coalition airstrikes and 100,000 fired mortars, missiles, rockets and artillery destroyed ISIS military capabilities and provided freedom of maneuver to regional security and SDF partner forces. Offensive operations in Iraq and Syria ultimately deprived ISIS of its oil collection facilities as well as $80 million a month in oil revenue, which negatively impacted ISIS military operations, destroyed ISIS in Iraq, contained ISIS expansion in Syria, and defeated the territorial-Caliphate.

Over the last 20 years, the speed and precision of SOF's current targeting capabilities have improved drastically. One of the greatest contributing factors to this phenomenon is the advent of the strike cell. Strike cells observe targets through Intelligence, Surveillance and Reconnaissance, enabling Joint Terminal Attack Controller lethal strikes on fleeting and dynamic targets within seconds. Precision fires are an all-inclusive joint effort, closely coordinated and executed from Joint SOF HQ strike-cells located at company echelon with the Advanced Operating Bases and at the battalion echelon with the SOTFs, in order to protect friendly forces, maintain the momentum of the SDF-led offensive, and defeat enemy forces in the MERV.

In OIR, most of the Advanced Operating Bases possessed strike cells, which increased the AOB's lethality and speed at the SOF company level. Strike cells consisted of Soldiers from various joint and allied partners such as Special Forces, Navy SEALs, Marine Special Operations and Coalition SOF. AOB strike cells largely controlled the entire Middle Euphrates River Valley fight. Strike cells

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were crucial when heavy enemy fire and vehicle-borne improvised explosive devices disrupted partner forces. This required close coordination at echelon from the SF Operational Detachments operating with an indigenous partner-force, through the battalion and brigade-like Special Operations Task Forces, and finally to the division level Special Operations Joint Task Force to effectively deliver the full complement of precision fires to the battlefield. Strike cells and cross-functional teams demonstrated SOF's ability to integrate capabilities and produce effects across multiple domains at the lowest levels.

Agility

Agility is one of SOF's strongest attributes. The advantages of small footprint and decentralized employment allows for rapid mobilization and displacement as the battlefield changes. Based on changing mission requirements, we successfully displaced SOF nodes as needed. We displaced our SOF footprint in Iraq to Syria and back as needed. Agility will be invaluable in the future operating environment when the Joint Force needs immediate solutions to buy time and space for the buildup of conventional forces or to create multiple dilemmas deep in enemy rear areas by collaborating with different forces or by using different techniques and technologies.

Tailoring Cross-Functional Teams by Mission

SOF's agility is not limited to physical displacement, but also true for its ability to change mission and organization rapidly. SOJTF-OIR saw the abundant employment of cross-functional teams at the tactical level. SOF Task Forces existed at battalion level and higher, but the limited footprint in Syria called for cross-functional

integration at lower levels. Cross-Functional Teams were tailored across time and space based on the missions and conditions on the ground. A Special Forces Operation Detachment Alpha is typically comprised of 12 Soldiers. In a contested environment like Northeastern Syria, additional combat enablers such as explosive ordnance disposal teams and joint terminal attack Controllers became indispensable to ODAs as they maneuvered with the SDF against ISIS. Simultaneous to the conventional SDF offensive in the Middle Euphrates River Valley, a secondary consolidate gains effort was conducted throughout Northeast Syria focused on intelligence-based raids along with other critical activities. In Ayn Issa, Syria, the Tactical PSYOP Company Commander led CFT Influence comprised of PSYOP teams, Public Affairs personnel, and a CA Team to create Northeast Syria's operational-level

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MORE THAN 15,000 COALITION AIRSTRIKES AND 100,000 FIRED MORTARS, MISSILES, ROCKETS AND ARTILLERY DESTROYED ISIS MILITARY CAPABILITIES AND PROVIDED FREEDOM OF MANEUVER TO REGIONAL SECURITY AND SDF PARTNER FORCES.

thon and not a sprint. As characterized by the name itself, the "Cold" War did not see the great powers commit to war directly against each other.[01] Instead, the U.S. engaged in greater regional competition against Russia and China for influence globally through various proxy wars to contain communism in places such as Greece, Iran, Paraguay, Lebanon, Taiwan, Korea and Vietnam. One might argue that Syria is the first armed conflict within the renewed Great Power Competition era against Russia and China. With Russia permanently basing its Soldiers in Syria[02] and China committing to supporting the Assad regime's rebuilding efforts,[03] at the very least, the conflict in Syria was an opportunity for *Great Powers* to reposition themselves in the Middle East. We will continue to see competition between democratic and authoritarian governments, with SOF continuing to serve as a strategic asset in global and interregional contexts.[04]

SOF's role and competitive advantages are universal and timeless. SOF employment makes sense from economic and political perspectives, and reduced domestic appetite for war. SOF operations are inherently joint, combined, and cross-functional; operations are ideal for MDO via an indigenous approach. Finally, SOF's indigenous force-generating capability can be key to avoiding escalation and miscalculation. In the meantime, SOF will continue to adapt, prepare the operational environment, and innovate our capabilities to meet the nation's needs. **SW**

messaging apparatus. In Raqqa, the CA team leader led the CFT of CA, Explosive Ordnance Disposal, Military Working Dog team and infantry augmentees to consolidate gains. Recurring mission analysis dictated the right capabilities to employ on the battlefield at the right time. For a future resource-constrained environment, it will be essential to determine must-haves vice nice-to-haves capabilities, and how to manage these capabilities across time, space, and echelon.

ARMY SOF IN MULTI-DOMAIN OPERATIONS: GPC AND LSCO

As we dust off the lessons learned from the Cold War, we should recall that the Cold War was a mara-

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SOF IN LARGE-SCALE COMBAT OPERATIONS:
A THEORY OF ACTION

BY LIEUTENANT COLONEL LUKE WITTMER

01

In the context of U.S. armed forces refocusing military strategy and capability requirements toward the increasing prospect of great power conflict in the post-Cold War era, the U.S. Army is refining its approach to joint large-scale combat operations while pivoting away from limited contingency operations) and a counterinsurgency mindset fostered by the post-9/11 conflicts waged over the previous two decades. The U.S. Army's recent revision of its operational doctrine, most notably of *Army Doctrine Publication and Field Manual 3-0*, is central to the Army's modernization efforts towards calibrating itself for LSCO. Any prospective joint LSCO campaign purposed towards achieving national military objectives would require the integration of special operations forces power. However, a review of contemporary U.S. Army and Joint SOF doctrine shows that presently there is a doctrinal gap pertaining to where and how SOF activities integrate within the context of LSCO.[01] A theory of action for the arrangement of SOF activities overlaid on the new *FM 3-0* battlefield framework is needed to address this gap. The purpose of this article is to offer such a theory for consideration. In LSCO, SOF effects are optimized in the deep area of the battlefield framework as well as on the periphery in the area of interest relative to corps and divisions. The proper alignment of resources for coordination at the component command and corps echelons is critical toward ensuring that joint targeting effects set the necessary conditions for maneuvering divisions and brigades to be successful in the close area fight.

Foremost, a few terms of reference are necessary to provide appropriate perspective. First, the new *ADP 3-0* defines *large-scale combat operations* as "extensive joint combat operations in terms of *scope and size* of forces committed, conducted as a campaign aimed at achieving operational and strategic objectives."[02] The new Army definition intends the scale of the means employed as one of the key differentiating factors between LSCO an LCO. Second, *Joint Publication 3-05* defines *special operations* as "Operations requiring unique modes of employment, tactical techniques, equipment and training often conducted in hostile, denied or politically sensitive environments and characterized by one or more of the following: time sensitive, clandestine, low visibility, conducted with and/or through indigenous forces, requiring regional expertise, and/or a high degree of risk."[03] Though familiar, this definition bears importance when sorting through proper employment of SOF in a LSCO setting. Third, *JP 3-05* also defines *special reconnaissance* as "Reconnaissance and surveillance actions conducted as a special operation in hostile, denied or diplomatically and/or politically sensitive environments to collect or verify information of *strategic or operational significance*, employing military capabilities not normally found in conventional forces."[04] This definition is necessary to contrast the often misguided inclination to employ SOF as tactical "scouts" or a bygone "long-range surveillance detachment" capability instead of supporting the intended application of SOF at the operational-level or higher.

Previous academic studies and literature demonstrate that the modes of special operations core activities presented in both *JP 3-05* and the new *ADP 3-05* are valid in the context of LSCO. However, the doctrine does not adequately lay out how the arrangement of activities with respect to time, space and force factors support the joint force in a LSCO environment. Drs. Robert Toguchi and Michael Krivdo, from the United States Army Special Operations Command, offer in *The Competitive Advantage* that SOF core activities binned under the four Army SOF p.illars of indigenous approaches, developing understanding and wielding influence, precision targeting operations and crisis response present multiple dilemmas for enemy commanders to confront in areas where conventional forces cannot access; principally relating to the battlefield's "deep" areas.[05] Another study offers that the cumulative effects of SOF activities can divert, disrupt, delay and destroy enemy forces relative to CF's deep areas or peripheral areas of interest.[06] These ideas nest well with concepts presented in the U.S. Army's doctrinal publication *Deep Operations ATP 3-94.2* which states that "During major operations, the effects of deep operations are typically more influential when directed against an enemy's ability to command, mass, maneuver, supply and reinforce available conventional combat forces...Command-

U.S. Army Special Operations Soldiers and Syrian Partner Forces prepare to conduct combat operations in Syria.
U.S. ARMY PHOTO

ers may use any number of tactical tasks during the execution of deep operations to divert, disrupt, delay, and destroy enemy forces."[07]

The findings also nest well within USASOC's emergent special operations concept to support prospective multi-domain operations. USASOC's concept advocates for the utilization of special operations to "extend the joint force's reach by expanding indigenous approaches, sensing deep to create *(sic)* a picture of the adversary's systems and striking the enemy throughout the operational framework principally in the Operational and Strategic Deep Fires Areas" as a underpinning logic of SOF contributions to MDO in LSCO.[08] More specifically, contributions that provide for "Physical, virtual and cognitive disruption/defeat of enemy activities in the operational and strategic deep fires areas," in addition to "Deep sensing/informational understanding and knowledge across the battlespace" both align with the central idea of SOF effects being optimized in the deep space and peripheral areas of interest.[09] Disaggregated further, targeting enemy anti-access area denial and long-range fires systems while enabling friendly fires across all domains to gain time and extend the penetrating reach of the joint force is the niche for the application of SOF in the not-so-distant future of LSCO doctrine.

SOF is optimized for LCO, or gray zone challenges. Many of these types of conflicts lend themselves well to an indirect approach for which SOF is often the most suitable force of choice. Inversely, CF is optimized for the direct approach and the close, combined arms fight of LSCO where speed, mobility, and the rapid concentration of overwhelming combat power are required to prevail.[10] That is not to say that SOF does not have a critical role to play in LSCO, or conversely, that CF does not contribute significantly to the LCO effort. However, the method for employing both on the various ends of the competition continuum should vary to enhance the strengths, competencies, and capabilities of both while minimizing the vulnerabilities of each. This synergy is the logic of CF-SOF interdependence, "the purposeful reliance of military forces and other partners on each other's capabilities, authorities, and actions to maximize the complementary and reinforcing effects of all."[11] In the context of LSCO, SOF offers very little in the "close" CF fight and incurs the most considerable amount of risk to force in terms of fratricide in a battlespace ruled by artillery, armor, and heavy weaponry. In terms of interdependence, the more substantial return on investment for SOF power applied in LSCO resides more in the "deep areas" beyond the fire support coordination line, rear of the

enemy's concentrated combat power where support areas are typically less heavily fortified and defended.

Of course, situation-dependent, the SOF commander may opt to assume a greater risk to force in the close area to support JFC and CFLCC targeting priorities. The constant evaluation of risk incurred by SOF forces operating in denied territories and deciding when to spike attributional, lethal SOF effects in support of JFC priorities as opposed to non-attributional, clandestine, or other non-lethal methods is the purview of the SOF commander. However, doctrine should better inform SOF and CF commanders and their staffs alike of the trade-off of risk to force versus the reward of mission outcomes from the perspective of a critical low-density capability's ability to support in the context of the broader joint campaign.

LSCO is also generally characterized by a significantly higher tempo relative to LCO. This idea is significant as it has a bearing on how SOF establishes its command architecture to command and control SOF units of action. In LCO, SOF units became accustomed to "powering down" resources and elements of mission command to the tactical-level

to enable SOF teams to operate with more agility to contest and combat enemy networks and asymmetrical or hybrid threats. In LSCO, SOF teams will presumably infiltrate into the deep areas in the enemy's rear or other denied territories where persistent, tactical C2 could lead to the compromise of SOF teams and their networks. To prevent this, SOF teams operating in denied areas work compartmentalized from one another and doctrinally report directly to the SOTF (O-5) headquarters, and eventually to the operational-level CJSOTF (O-6) headquarters. Thereby, the CJSOTF and SOJTF (usually O-8) headquarters — as the SOF-version of CF echelon above brigade (EAB) headquarters — must exercise a more active role in operational-level mission command to effectively synchronize SOF actions while keeping up with the higher operational tempo of LSCO. The key to success is the effective integration and coordination with adjacent component commands and maneuver units' headquarters at the operational-level.

Conventional Force headquarters at EAB also operate differently in a LSCO than a LCO environment. In the previous two decades of LCO, it was not uncommon for a corps to assume a JFC-type role. In LSCO, the corps becomes more of a tactical "fighting" headquarters maneuvering subordinate divisions while managing long-range surface-to-surface fires assets. The LSCO fight described in doctrine is more linear and requires some understanding of battlefield geometry and space in relation to forces operating through time. In the LSCO battlefield geometry, the range of organic or supporting fires assets that shape the fight appropriately for the hand-off to subordinate maneuver units determines a unit's AO depth at echelon. The corps is responsible for nominating targets for shaping fires beyond the FSCL to the land component commander and closely coordinates joint fires interdiction with the Combined Forces Air Component Command. The purpose of joint fires interdiction — an action to divert, disrupt, delay or destroy the enemy's military surface capability before it can be used effectively against friendly forces — closely resembles intended outcomes for SOF effects in the deep area and therefore the component

command echelon within the JFC is an optimal point for integration of SOF with adjacent unit headquarters.[12]

To this end, it is ideal for the SOJTF headquarters to maintain the responsibility to provide liaison teams at the component command level in the context of a standing joint supporting-supported command relationship to integrate planning efforts while coordinating effects in support of JFC priority objectives. The CJSOTF should then be responsible for the coordination of SOF effects at the corps level. This is effectively accomplished with the mutual exchange of liaison teams with the priority effort corps headquarters in the context of a joint coordinating relationship. SOTF headquarters primarily coordinates with division headquarters. However, the SOTF may or may not opt to provide liaison teams to an adjacent division headquarters as a means of mitigating the risk of fratricide to SOF operating within the divisions' AO. The utility of SOF in the close fight, the arena of divisions and BCTs, is minimal. Therefore, the requirement for SOF to invest heavily in liaison packages at the division level should typically be less than at corps and higher echelons unless an assigned objective within a division's AO directly supports a JFC-level priority target.

Figure 01 attempts to show where SOF effects are most significant and which SOF echelon is responsible for coordination within the LSCO battlefield framework. Of note, the diagram is a snapshot in time of a linear, contiguous battle space and does not account for non-contiguous framework models. However, the logic of SOF's contribution to the JFC deep areas and peripheral seams and gaps remains. The LSCO battlefield framework is dynamic and ever changing. Intermediate military objectives of importance to the JFC may start out in the strategic deep area, but over time move into the focus of the fighting corps until they come within range of the FSCL, and consequently, become the close fight.

In contrast to the potential payoff of properly aligning liaison teams with the right echelon headquarters, the misalignment of SOF liaison team resources at echelons below the corps level carries the hidden cost of potential misunderstanding and misappropriation of SOF resources. Much of the expectation of

SOF liaison support from a CJSOTF to a division headquarters emanates from legacy experiences in a LCO environment where divisions and corps headquarters are accustomed to operating in a more operational-level role. The presence of a SOF liaison team can send the unintended signal that the division, or lower echelon, is the supported unit and thereby result in false expectations for CF commanders regarding SOF effects to support operations in their respective AOs. These false expectations can lead to the misunderstanding and misappropriation of low-density SOF assets to serve as a tactical "scouts" or "LRSD" capability in support of the division's objectives, while limited SOF capacity means employment in this way will leave critical JFC targeting priorities unaddressed. Doctrine should better clarify the nuanced difference of SOF special reconnaissance activities juxtaposed to division, and even corps-level, reconnaissance tasks. Where SOF-aligned JFC targeting priorities overlap with subordinate corps and division targeting priorities in their respective AOs becomes the essential opportunity for CF and SOF integration, collaboration, and coordination.

SOF must also better define the process for staffing effects requests. Effects requests supported by SOF should closely resemble the CFACC's air support requests process by staffing vertically from the BCT to the division, and from the division to the corps. Based on the battlefield geometry outlined above, the corps is typically the first level that nominates targets beyond the FSCL for joint interdiction. The component command then processes the formal request at the joint targeting coordination board where SOF assets are aligned against selected targets. Simultaneously, active coordination between the corps and CJSOTF headquarters is on-going to facilitate the targeting and assessment process. Ideally, the corps should submit effects requests involving SOF no later than 96-hours out to ensure enough time for the SOJTF and CJSOTF to process the request given the constraints of communications windows for teams and assets operating in the denied space. This requires a solid grasp of where SOF has access and can generate effects, and the time and resources required to shift

this access to new areas. The 96-hour planning horizon also nests within the targeting board timelines that parallel the joint air tasking cycle.

In conclusion, the doctrine for integrating SOF power in a LSCO environment is insufficient. A theory of action for SOF in support of LSCO is the subject of on-going research and observations from lessons learned in various exercises, to include the Army's Mission Command Training Program Warfighter exercise series. The theory offered in this paper is derivative from research and lessons learned to date. A doctrine that communicates the optimized utility of SOF effects in the deep area and peripheral areas of interest beyond the FSCL is critical to further understand how SOF headquarters should define the LSCO fight at echelon. SOJTF targeting should align with JFC targeting priorities in the deep space to shape the battle for the maneuvering corps and division headquarters. A doctrinal concept that aligns SOF effects and necessary coordination efforts to synchronize SOF actions in time, space, and purpose at echelon with the linear, contiguous battlefield framework will provide for a common understanding of how SOF fights at the operational-level of war in a LSCO setting. **SW**

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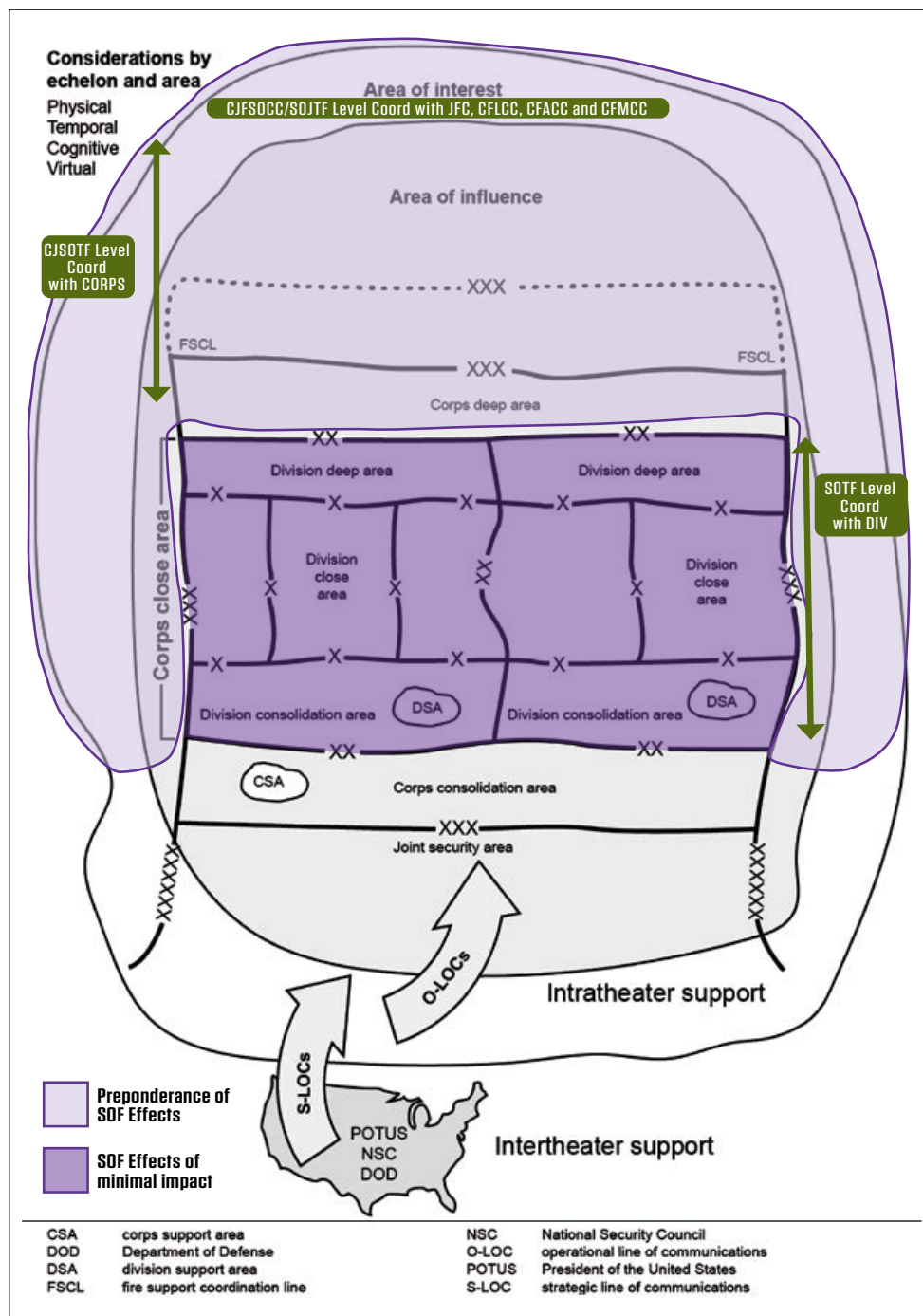

Figure 01 **Concept of SOF effects and coordination in support of large-scale combat operations in a contiguous battlefield framework of a corps AO. Figure modified from U.S. Department of the Army,** *Field Manual (FM) 3-0, Change 1, Operations* **(Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 2017), 1-32.**

NOTES **01.** Luke A. Wittmer, "SOF in Large-Scale Combat Operations: An Operational-Level Analysis of the British SOE in Crete and Greece during World War II" (Monograph, U.S. Army Command and General Staff College School of Advanced Military Studies, 2019), 3. **02.** U.S. Department of the Army, *Army Doctrine Publication (ADP) 3-0, Operations* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 2019), 1-5. **03.** U.S. Department of Defense, Joint Staff, *Joint Publication (JP) 3-05, Special Operations* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 2014), GL-11. **04.** U.S. Department of Defense, Joint Staff, *Joint Publication (JP) 3-05, Special Operations* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 2014), GL-12. **05.** Robert M. Toguchi and Michael E. Krivdo, "Introduction: Special Operations Forces in Large-Scale Combat Operations," in *The Competitive Advantage: Special Operations Forces in Large-Scale Combat Operations*, edited by Robert M. Toguchi and Michael E. Krivdo, 1-8 (Army University Press: Fort Leavenworth, KS, 2019), 1-2. **06.** Luke A. Wittmer, "SOF in Large-Scale Combat Operations: An Operational-Level Analysis of the British SOE in Crete and Greece during World War II" (Monograph, U.S. Army Command and General Staff College School of Advanced Military Studies, 2019), 2. **07.** U.S. Department of the Army, *Army Techniques Publication (ATP) 3-94.2, Deep Operations* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 2016), 1-4. **08.** U.S. Army Special Operations Command, *U.S. Army Special Operations Concept DRAFT Version 0.5* (Concept Paper, USASOC CDID, Concepts Division, 2019), ii. **09.** U.S. Army Special Operations Command, *U.S. Army Special Operations Concept DRAFT Version 0.5* (Concept Paper, USASOC CDID, Concepts Division, 2019), ii. **10.** U.S. Department of the Army, *Field Manual (FM) 3-0, Change 1, Operations* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 2017), 1-31. **11.** Air Land Sea Application Center, *Field Manual (FM) 6-05, CF-SOF: Multi-Service Tactics, Techniques, and Procedures for Conventional Forces and Special Operations Forces Integration, Interoperability, and Interdependence* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 2018), 1. **12.** U.S. Department of the Army, *Field Manual (FM) 3-0, Change 1, Operations* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 2017), 1-31.

ARSOF CONTRIBUTIONS TO CONSOLIDATING GAINS

BY LIEUTENANT COLONEL CODY BROWN

CONTEXT

Much of the current thinking on employment of Special Operations Forces focuses on fighting "deep." While operating well forward of conventional maneuver forces, SOF will gather information and generate effects in areas that are denied to the majority of the joint force, but well suited to SOF's unique capabilities. Employing SOF in the deep area is logical and necessary, but not sufficient. The tempo required to penetrate and dis-integrate a near-peer adversary's Integrated Fires Complex and Integrated Air Defense System will likely require the Army to bypass large pockets of resistance. When this is combined with an adversary adept at combining aspects of traditional and irregular warfare, our nation should expect a significant challenge in consolidating gains. SOF cannot be the sole answer to this challenge, but the niche application of SOF capabilities provides a Joint Force Commander with a valuable tool. ARSOF should form a limited, though integral, part of the joint effort to consolidate gains accomplished through unique partner-force relationships, deep local understanding and influence, and unique direct action capabilities. The amount of effort ARSOF can dedicate toward consolidating gains will vary over the course of the conflict. Of note, the conventional force portions of the Civil Affairs and PSYOP regiments have a significant role in consolidating gains, but that is not the focus of this article.

As defined in *ADP 3-0, Operations* "Army operations to consolidate gains are activities to make enduring any temporary operational success and to set the conditions for a sustainable security environment, allowing for a transition of control to other legitimate authorities."[01] Consolidating gains is a continuous process, not a phase. Consolidating gains is focused on exploiting tactical success and maintaining pressure "to ensure enemy forces cannot reconstitute any form of resistance in areas where they were initially defeated."[02] Typical activities to consolidate gains include offensive maneuver to reduce bypassed enemy forces, area security and support to stabilization. Not all activities to consolidate gains are appropriate for SOF, but some are well suited for unique SOF capabilities. Generally speaking, consolidating gains prevents the enemy from continuing the conflict, whether by conventional or irregular means. Consolidating gains will have different challenges if the U.S. or coalition forces are liberating recently occupied territory and returning control to an allied or partner nation, or removing an adversarial power and replacing it with a different governing authority. This article will focus on the first scenario, which is more plausible in the context of a near-peer threat.

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U.S. Army Soldiers assigned to Combined Joint Task Force-Operation Inherent Resolve work with partners in northeastern Syria. Building partner force relationships is an integral part of the effort of consolidating gains. U.S. ARMY PHOTO BY SPC. JENSEN GUILLORY

The effort required to consolidate gains will vary over the course of the conflict and require commanders to accept risk while balancing priorities. Ultimately, failure to consolidate gains would cede the initiative to an enemy determined to continue the conflict through various means, and "generally leads to failure in achieving the desired end state."[03] Prioritizing resources between the deep fight and other requirements like consolidating gains will ultimately be a decision for the Special Operations Component and Joint Force Commanders, but consolidating gains is too important for SOF to ignore. Elements of ARSOF Civil Affairs and Psychological Operations units, Special Forces, 75th Ranger Regiment and 160th Special Operations Aviation Regiment and the 528th Sustainment Brigade should be employed to help the joint force consolidate gains. The first way they can do this is through partner force relationships.

UNIQUE PARTNER FORCE RELATIONSHIPS

ADP 3-05, Army Special Operations states that "Drawing on their ability to work closely with foreign security forces, Army special operations forces may prove uniquely suited to identifying and neutralizing bypassed enemy forces attempting to organize continued or new resistance to joint operations."[04] This points to the first broad reason for employing SOF in consolidating gains: unique partner force relationships. SOF routinely partners with a variety of units, including partner or allied SOF and elements of a partner or ally's Ministry of the Interior or other security services. Some of these partners (such as some allied SOF) are well suited for operations in the deep area, and some are better suited to consolidating gains. ARSOF may be able to transition some of these relationships to conventional forces, but the conventional force will also have limited capacity, especially in the early stages of conflict. Additionally, relationships developed over years of cooperation are not always easily transitioned in an emergency. In many cases it will make sense for U.S. SOF to continue these long-standing relationships, and enable partnered operations to consolidate gains.

In another type of unique partner force relationship, U.S. SOF (primarily SF) may be partnered with a resistance force in occupied territory. In many cases this will also be the product of years of work and long-standing relationships. Once that territory is liberated, U.S. SOF

CONSOLIDATING GAINS

"Army operations to consolidate gains are activities to make enduring any temporary operational success and to set the conditions for a sustainable security environment, allowing for a transition of control to other legitimate authorities."

— *ADP 3-0, Operations*

may be well employed in transitioning a former guerilla force into a force that is focused on consolidating gains and supporting a reinstated allied government structure. In principle, U.S. SOF could instead be withdrawn to reconsolidate and insert further forward. In practice, as allied territory is liberated the deep area will eventually be limited to the territory of the adversary itself. In most situations widespread insertion of SOF into the sovereign territory of an adversary (as opposed to occupied territory) will be limited by political as well as strategic and tactical considerations. While some SOF will be reconsolidated and reinserted, that will not be the case for all SOF elements. Available SOF elements can instead be employed in newly liberated territory, where they can effectively employ the relationships and local understanding they have built.

DEEP LOCAL UNDERSTANDING AND INFLUENCE

ARSOF is persistently engaged in competition,[05] with elements stationed or deployed in more than 70 countries.[06] This persistent engagement along with the regional orientation of many ARSOF elements allows a deep local understanding and a degree of influence built over years, and in some cases, decades of effort. This is critical to accomplishing U.S. objectives short of armed conflict outlined in the *2018 National Defense Strategy*, such as deterring adversary aggression, enabling U.S. interagency partners to advance U.S. influence and interests, and maintaining favorable regional balances of power.[07] Deep local understanding continues to be a significant advantage if conflict does occur. In consolidating gains, particularly in the context of returning control of liberated territory to an ally or partner, elements of ARSOF are likely to have the background, knowledge and relationships to facilitate a smoother process. The employment of ARSOF in this way will be limited by capacity, but the precise use of ARSOF can help shape the consolidation of gains in a favorable way. Though not necessarily limited to CA, an ARSOF CA team working in coordination with their conventional force CA counterparts provides an example. Once mobilized, conventional force CA will bring much more capacity than ARSOF CA alone. ARSOF CA elements can help orient conventional force counterparts, provide local context and introductions, and shape the employment of the increased capacity conventional CA forces bring. This local understanding and influence can also shape the application of direct action.

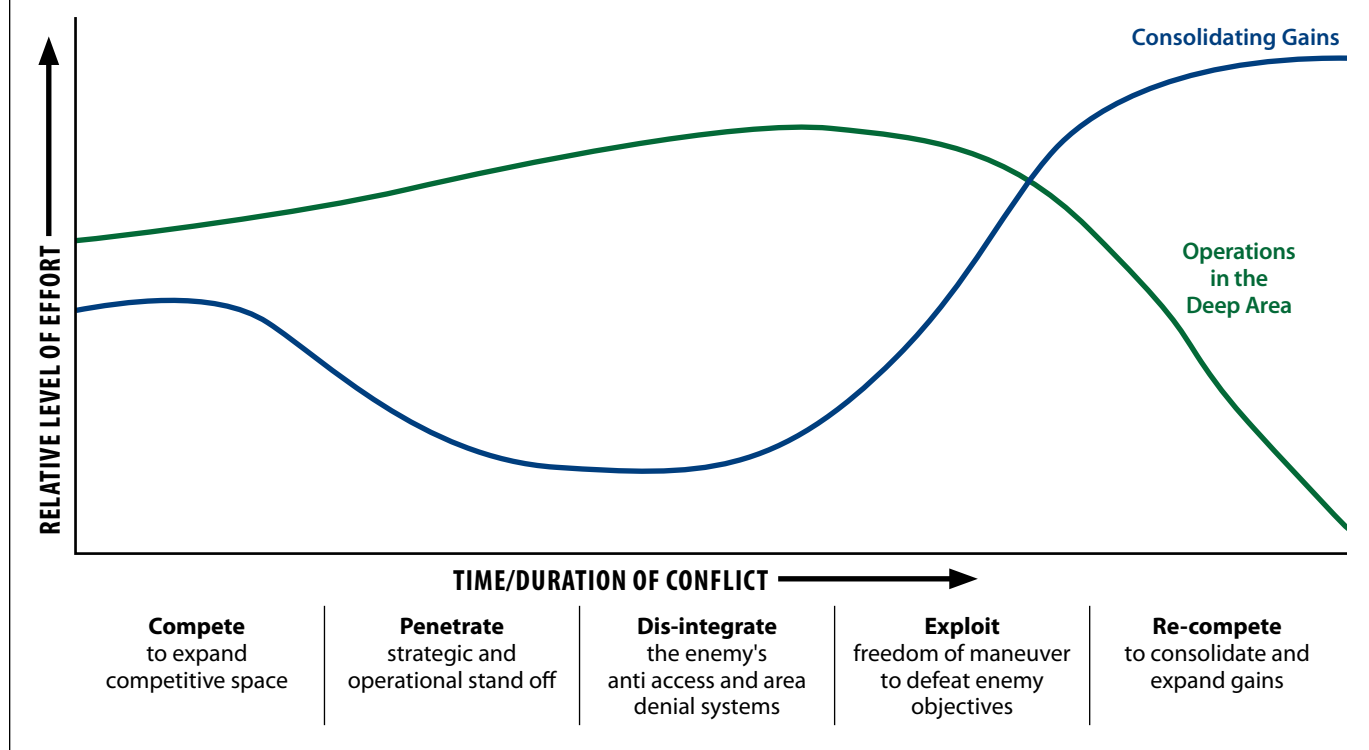**FIGURE 01: POTENTIAL RELATIVE WEIGHT OF ARSOF EFFORT**

Consolidating Gains

Operations in the Deep Area

RELATIVE LEVEL OF EFFORT

TIME/DURATION OF CONFLICT

Compete to expand competitive space | **Penetrate** strategic and operational stand off | **Dis-integrate** the enemy's anti access and area denial systems | **Exploit** freedom of maneuver to defeat enemy objectives | **Re-compete** to consolidate and expand gains

Figure 01
The relative weight of SOF effort toward consolidating gains is likely to form a "U" shaped curve over the course of conflict. In the early stages of conflict it enables the joint force to build combat power. As the conflict progresses, more of SOF's effort is focused on the deep fight. In later stages of conflict, the SOF effort towards consolidating gains increases again as focus shifts to supporting a reinstated allied government.

UNIQUE CAPABILITIES IN DIRECT ACTION

ARSOF also possesses unique capabilities associated with the core activity of direct action that can support wider efforts to consolidate gains. Direct action is "conducted with specialized military capabilities to seize, destroy, capture, exploit, recover or damage designated targets in hostile, denied or diplomatically and/or politically sensitive environments."[08] DA can differ from conventional offensive operations in several ways, including "the degree of discriminate and precise use of force to achieve specific objectives."[09] This degree of precision can be useful in helping to consolidate gains, particularly when informed by a deep local understanding and unique partners and networks. Whether targeting key individuals such as the leadership of an enemy clandestine network, or key enemy capabilities, DA can be a useful contribution to consolidating gains.

It is important, however, to acknowledge the limitations of DA in consolidating gains. Until large scale conflict is over, most DA capacity will be needed to penetrate and dis-integrate enemy defenses, present the enemy with multiple dilemmas, and exploit the resulting freedom of maneuver. Relatively little DA capacity will be available in the consolidation area. Second, consolidating gains requires a broader effort than DA alone. DA is a useful, arguably a necessary contribution, but it will not be sufficient on its own. The Vietnam-era Civilian Irregular Defense Group provides an example of layering unique partner forces, local understanding, and a

partnered direct action capability. In this effort, Special Forces personnel partnered with minority ethnic groups in contested areas to combat enemy forces in areas with little to no conventional force presence. Special Forces partnered with CIDG to provide area security, help resolve disputes and contribute to essential services (particularly medical care), all of which helped prevent the local population from supporting the enemy. The SF/CIDG partnership also provided intelligence and, especially in the later years, established partnered quick reaction and strike forces.[10] Though the context is different, the same ideas can be applied to ARSOF support to consolidating gains. The potential benefits justify employing a portion of ARSOF capacity toward consolidating gains, though the relative amount of capacity that can be employed in this way will vary over time.

THE WEIGHT OF EFFORT WILL VARY AT DIFFERENT STAGES OF THE CONFLICT

The relative weight of SOF effort toward consolidating gains is likely to form a "U" shaped curve over the course of a conflict. In the early stages of conflict it will be critically important to enable the joint force to build combat power. The adversary will likely seek to prevent this, in part through the use of proxies and irregular forces in allied or partner territory. Some of SOF's efforts against these threats to enable the joint force to build combat power could be considered consolidation of gains. Additionally, the special operations component

may not be able to immediately employ all available SOF in the deep area. Some SOF will be employed deep immediately, through a combination of "staying in place" in newly occupied territory and rapid infiltration. The joint force may need to set additional conditions before infiltrating and employing additional forces in the deep area. Until those conditions are set, a portion of the available SOF can be gainfully employed supporting the consolidation of gains. A Joint Force Commander may find it necessary to employ ARSOF in this way given relatively limited conventional force capacity in the early stages of conflict, and the potential repercussions of being unable to build sufficient combat power.

As conflict progresses, more of SOF's effort is likely to focus on the deep fight. Indeed, this will be critical to the joint force's ability to penetrate and dis-integrate adversary defenses. SOF elements in occupied territory that reduced their signature to avoid compromise will become more active. Direct action and other capabilities will be urgently needed farther forward, leaving little capacity for support to consolidating gains.

In the latter stages of conflict, the relative amount of SOF effort towards consolidating gains is likely to increase again. A greater portion of territory will be liberated, and unless the U.S. is willing to consider the unrestricted employment of SOF within the territory of an adversary itself, there will probably be fewer opportunities to employ SOF deep. A larger amount of effort will go toward supporting a reinstated allied government structure against bypassed forces and irregular adversaries.

COUNTER ARGUMENT: THE DEEP FIGHT IS MORE IMPORTANT FOR ARSOF

A likely criticism of the argument presented here is that the deep fight is more important for ARSOF than consolidation of gains and is too important to dilute limited ARSOF capacity elsewhere. ARSOF (and SOF more broadly) can make a unique contribution as the only viable ground force in the deep area. This can provide sensing and generate effects for the joint force that are not achievable by any other formation. In contrast, a variety of formations including Military Police, Maneuver Enhancement Brigades, and Brigade Combat Teams can influence the consolidation area.

This is largely a valid point, but too broad to be applied as a blanket statement. The deep fight should remain the priority for ARSOF, but there will be times when special operations capability is required in other areas of the battle space. ARSOF may be directed to support consolidating gains early in the conflict, when a certain amount of consolidation is necessary to build combat power and sufficient conventional forces are simply not available. In the latter stages of conflict the scope for further employment of ARSOF in the deep area may be more limited, while the threat from the consolidation

area will increase if not adequately addressed. While it is critical to train and prepare for the demanding requirements for employment in the deep area, ARSOF should also be prepared to help consolidate gains when that is what the situation requires.

CONCLUSION

Though consolidating gains is critical, SOF capacity is limited. Prioritizing employment of that limited capacity will ultimately be a decision for senior Special Operations Component and Joint Force Commanders, and the majority of SOF effort is likely to be dedicated to the deep area, where SOF can operate in a way that no other part of the joint force can. However, there are good reasons to commit a portion of limited ARSOF capacity to consolidating gains. ARSOF will bring unique partner force relationships, including relationships with non-military partners. Many of these partners are well suited to consolidating gains, especially in their own country. ARSOF elements have developed deep local understanding and influence through long-term engagement, and this can be leveraged to inform and guide broader efforts to consolidate gains. Finally, direct action can be an important part of consolidating gains. The amount of capacity that ARSOF can dedicate to consolidating gains will vary over the course of the conflict, and will likely be lowest at the height of the conflict. Within that significant limitation, ARSOF can make a critical contribution to the joint force effort to consolidate gains. 🅢🅦

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NOTES **01.** U.S. Department of the Army, *Army Doctrinal Publication (ADP) 3-0, Operations* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 2019), 1-6. **02.** Ibid, 3-5 **03.** Ibid, 3-5. **04.** Ibid, 1-17. **05.** "Competition" here references a portion of the Competition Continuum defined in the Joint Concept for Integrated Campaigning (JCIC) and used in the Army's concept for Multi Domain Operations, TRADOC PAM 525-3-1. **06.** U.S. Army Special Operations Command, USASOC Fact Book, available at https://www.soc.mil/USASOCHQ/USASOCFactBook.pdf, accessed 14 May 2020, 6. **07.** U.S. Department of Defense, Summary of the 2018 National Defense Strategy, available at https://dod.defense.gov/Portals/1/Documents/pubs/2018-National-Defense-Strategy-Summary.pdf, accessed 20 May 2020. **08.** U.S. Department of Defense, *Joint Publication (JP) 3-05, Special Operations* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 2014), x. **09.** U.S. Department of the Army, Army Doctrinal Publication (ADP) *3-05, Army Special Operations* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 2019), 2-5. **10.** Eugene G. Piasecki and Luke C. Guerin, "Chapter 9: Civilian Irregular Defense Group in Vietnam" in *The Competitive Advantage: Special Operations Forces in Large-Scale Combat Operations*, edited by Robert M. Toguchi and Michael E. Krivdo (Army University Press: Fort Leavenworth, KS, 2019).

REFLECTIONS ON
ADVANCED OPERATING BASE - WEST

December 2018- June 2019 deployment alongside Syrian Democratic Forces.

BY CAPTAIN RYAN BROD, MAJOR JAMES GARRISON, CAPTAIN BENJAMIN JOHNSON, AND SERGEANT FIRST CLASS CODY WAITE

United States Special Operation Forces in Northeastern Syria offer insight into the conditions for succeeding in "light-footprint" operations. Our experience in Syria highlights the importance of finding a capable and determined local partner which allows USSOF to focus on operational and strategic rather than tactical tasks. The Syrian Democratic Forces, along with their accompanying governance and internal security institutions, were exceptional partners who displayed incredible resilience and aggressiveness in the face of multiple challenges as they doggedly improved security and stability in the areas they controlled. By maintaining a strong foundation of trust and open dialogue with the Syrian Democratic Forces, we overcame a series of obstacles and mitigated the threat from a resurgent ISIS while deterring external aggression in northeastern Syria.

The complex and dynamic nature of the Syrian conflict led to a high degree of uncertainty in U.S. policy in Northeastern Syria. With near-constant pressure to reduce the U.S. footprint and an extremely low tolerance for U.S. casualties, circumstances forced USSOF to play to its strengths, particularly working "by, with and through" partners.

Up until the final collapse of the physical ISIS caliphate in March 2019, the front-line fight against ISIS in the Middle Euphrates River Valley remained the task force's main effort and correspondingly received the bulk of avail-

able resources. Operations in liberated terrain and along areas abutting the Syrian Regime and Turkish-controlled areas were consequently constrained by economy of force considerations even as ISIS expended significant effort to retain, rebuild and expand their networks. During this period, ISIS intensified operations in ethnically mixed and strategically important locations like Manbij, Raqqa, Tabqah and zones along the Turkish border; these regions also faced insurgent threats from Syrian Regime or Syrian Opposition-affiliated actors. With only a single cross-functional team dedicated to each of these areas – typically a Special Forces Operational Detachment – Alpha augmented by a civil affairs team, tactical psychological operations team and an infantry platoon — operators had a lot on their plates as they trained, advised, assisted and accompanied multiple partner force organizations in each location.

As they operated against ISIS networks, USSOF teams worked with several

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U.S. Army Soldiers conduct mission planning and rehearsals with Syrian Democratic Forces partners in preparation for a raid to detain an ISIS cell leader in Raqqa, Syria. U.S. ARMY PHOTO BY SERGEANT FIRST CLASS RYAN VOCCOLA

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Green Berets and their Syrian partner forces conduct a joint patrol mission in Syria. U.S. ARMY PHOTO BY STAFF SGT. WILLIAM HOWARD

different organizations in each area as the Syrian Democratic Forces developed multiple military, police and intelligence institutions with overlapping responsibilities for targeting enemy cells and providing general security. While teams expended some effort training basic combat skills and tactics, they devoted far more time to assisting partner targeting cycles, building consensus amongst and synchronizing different entities and leveraging coalition capabilities to support the Syrian Democratic Forces' operations.

What this typically looked like in practice was operators seated alongside partner-force commanders in a joint operations room synchronizing multiple raid forces and their corresponding cordons, supporting aircraft and other enabling assets. Our teams still occasionally accompanied partner raid elements but only when we determined that our operators' presence would be a decisive factor in mission success and that the target was a critical node in an enemy network. We also sometimes leveraged accompany operations as a rapport builder with certain organizations to help increase the partners' willingness to share intelligence and respond quickly to intelligence provided by the coalition. However, accompanying a partner force on a single raid consumed a significant amount of resources and time and the Syrian Democratic Forces were almost always effective tactically as they already had significant experience fighting ISIS, unmatched understanding of their environment and high morale. Capable of operating in small and empowered elements with a high risk tolerance, our partners were often able to react more rapidly to events than we were. On several occasions they carried out chains of daylight raids — often with only three to four personnel on target — to dismantle an entire network in a single day. In these situations, our operators' primary contribution came as they assisted with biometrics and exploitation to drive the subsequent targeting cycle.

Integrating sensitive coalition intelligence into the partner force targeting cycle sometimes created friction as we struggled to articulate the reasons for delays or cancellations of operations without compromising methods. Our partners often overestimated our capabilities and we devoted substantial effort to convincing them that we were not withholding information in order to manipulate them. After several raids against ISIS cells resulted in a popular backlash that threatened the fragile relationship between the Syrian Democratic Forces and elements of Arab society, our partners began to retain approval for raids at their command level. It took us a while to figure out how to effectively and efficiently engage their decision-makers and we missed several time-sensitive targets in the interim. This process also exposed the dilemma our partners faced as they weighed the advantages and disadvantages of operations when destroying an ISIS cell could also result in widespread unrest as tribal members sought revenge for the deaths of their relatives. Here again, trust and effective communication were the foundation for the successes we achieved.

Each of our teams also confronted and deterred one or more strategic challenges from external actors. In Manbij, our team balanced Russian military and Syrian Regime encroachment and simmering tension along our partners' front line with the Turkish-backed Syrian opposition as they tried to uphold the "Manbij Roadmap" agreement between the United States and Turkey. A second

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ACCOMPANYING A PARTNER FORCE ON A SINGLE RAID CONSUMED A SIGNIFICANT AMOUNT OF RESOURCES AND TIME AND THE SYRIAN DEMOCRATIC FORCES WERE ALMOST ALWAYS EFFECTIVE TACTICALLY AS THEY ALREADY HAD SIGNIFICANT EXPERIENCE FIGHTING ISIS, UNMATCHED UNDERSTANDING OF THEIR ENVIRONMENT, AND HIGH MORALE.

team also worked to calm tensions with Turkey as they maintained observation posts and supported partner force raids against ISIS cells in Kobane, Tal Abyad and Ras al Ayn. Our team in Tabqah targeted ISIS cells in pivotal terrain where the Syrian Democratic Forces-controlled zone abutted areas under Regime control. In a week-long incident that became known as the "berm wars," operators in Tabqah deftly calibrated support as the Syrian Democratic Forces engaged in a standoff with the Syrian Regime over the exact delineation of the line of control. Nearby in Raqqa, our operators supported their partners against threats from Syrian Regime and Iranian Threat Network-affiliated cells while continuing to pursue recovering remnants of ISIS.

As we revised our footprint to maintain pressure on ISIS, we focused on working ourselves out of a job and transitioning what tactical and operational level tasks we could to our partners without sacrificing situational awareness. Sometimes these involved technical and equipment solutions: while our partners lacked airborne surveillance capabilities, we helped them establish extensive closed-circuit television networks in Raqqa and Manbij which often allowed them to identify and retrace the movements of attackers. At other times we

would fill a gap by training a capable unit that the partners would use as a model in a variant of the train the trainer approach. Overall, the Syrian Democratic Forces were extremely effective at replicating, disseminating and implementing any new skill or technology that we taught them. They also experimented with different organizations and approaches in response to challenges; at times our primary role involved vetting and refining their own initiatives.

The Syrian Democratic Forces' complicated and controversial history required our teams to devote significant attention to information operations and support to civil governance. Our teams' operators worked alongside partner media cells to support tactical operations as well as general stability and security. Civil affairs operators provided similar support to civil councils struggling to provide services to war-stressed populations. While much has been made of the heavy presence of Kurds in leadership positions in Arab-majority cities like Raqqa and Manbij, our partners repeatedly demonstrated a nuanced yet humble understanding of local tribal and political dynamics. The Syrian Democratic Forces developed a vetted cadre of tribal experts who advised their leaders

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when engaging with local tribes. They certainly made mistakes, but they overcame severe setbacks like the assassinations of significant tribal figures and the revolt of an allied militia (Raqqa Revolutionaries Brigade). Lacking anything approaching the resourcing necessary to address the economic and infrastructure needs in areas devastated by years of civil war, much less the ability to devote substantial funds towards buying off embedded patronage networks, our partners succeeded in gradually improving security and living standards in areas under their control despite near-constant predictions of instability from outside observers. They went to significant lengths to restructure their institutions to allow for more local participation and leadership while retaining a centralized enough structure to muster forces against external threats. We worked continuously to understand, advise and assist them with their strategy and institutional development as they reacted to shifting geopolitical currents.

Building and preserving trust remained essential, especially as our partners perceived the December 2018 announcement of an impending U.S. withdrawal from Northeastern Syria as a significant threat to their existence. Repeat deployments of detachments and personnel to the same areas, unremitting efforts to learn more about the environment and individual language skills were critical as our operators sought to understand and influence our partners. For example, our Manbij detachment had concluded their previous deployment to the city only eight months prior. They effectively maintained situational awareness of developments within the city and were able to quickly re-establish relationships upon their return. The trust they maintained with local leaders proved crucial as Russian Forces and the Syrian Regime began to infiltrate

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Syrian Democratic Forces and U.S. Soldiers meet with local business leaders in Northern Syria. Building and preserving trust with partner forces and local populations is an essential part of military operations in Syria. In particular, repeat deployments of detachments and personnel to the same areas, and individual language skills are critical for SOF as they seek to understand and influence our partners. U.S. ARMY PHOTOS BY SPC. ABIGAIL GRAHAM

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Members of a Syrian Quick Reaction Force review squad movement techniques during small unit tactics training in Manbij, Syria. Coalition advisors previously trained the partner force cadre as part of a "train-the-trainer" initiative. U.S. ARMY PHOTOS BY SGT. NICOLE PAESE

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U.S. Forces advise Syrian Democratic Forces partners during command and control of a clearing operation to dismantle ISIS cells in Raqqa, Syria. U.S. ARMY PHOTO BY SERGEANT FIRST CLASS CHRISTOPHER SHELTON

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the area in an attempt to split the region away from the rest of the Syrian Democratic Forces within four weeks of the detachment's return to Manbij. Fortunately, our teams had several operators conversant in the local dialect of Arabic. Beyond the fact that it is far easier to build rapport without using an interpreter as an intermediary, our detachment-level contracted interpreters sometimes lacked the knowledge of the environment — and relevant terminology in Arabic — to perform effectively. Some interpreters were extraordinary and made significant personal contributions to the mission. Nevertheless, in other cases we avoided serious misunderstandings (sometimes allied militias and adversary militias have similar sounding names and iconography) and social awkwardness through the timely intervention of our own personnel. Several of our key partner force leaders also regularly asked to speak privately with our Arabic-speaking operators to express more candid feedback during periods when our relationship was under significant stress.

Ensuring that USSOF and our partners really understood each other's priorities, concerns, capabilities and decision-making process was a constant battle. It was easy to mistake a lack of resources for unwillingness to perform a particular activity or to get frustrated with the hesitation and reluctance that occasionally prevented our partners' institutions from effectively working together without considering how our own task force and interagency colleagues often faced similar coordination problems. Our partners' outlook was constantly changing and it was challenging for our operators to understand the entangled relationships of the status quo — and even more demanding when we tried to predict and shape the future. Our best operators never became complacent

about the extent of their understanding of, and ability to shape, the environment. We often learned through trial and error so quickly recognizing and correcting for our missteps was crucial. Fortunately, the Syrian Democratic Forces were a patient, reflective, and humble partner.

The conditions surrounding the United States' operations in Syria are somewhat unique – we typically work with recognized national governments and we were somewhat constrained in what we could provide to a non-state partner considered to be a terrorist organization by one of our NATO allies. Nevertheless, our experience there demonstrates that we can effectively combat multiple insurgent threats while simultaneously engaging in regional great-power competition with a small force when we have a capable and determined local partner. We achieved more by building influence with our partners in the Syrian Democratic Forces than we could have accomplished on our own, and our operators hard-earned understanding of the environment, language capabilities and combat skills were crucial in that endeavour. **SW**

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STRENGTH, HONOR & MERCY
— AT THE LIMIT OF ADVANCE —

BY MAJOR MORGAN BROWN

Dedicated to Army Chief Warrant Officer 2 Jonathan R. Farmer, 3rd Battalion, 5th Special Forces Group (Airborne). This short account of the fight in the East does not tell Chief Farmer's story, or the story of the struggle in the West, but it would not have been possible without his sacrifice and the sacrifice of his teammates on January 16, 2019.

The Global Coalition to defeat the Islamic State Group formed in September of 2014, and the fight to free Northeastern Syria from Caliphate control followed. That winter, U.S. Special Operations Forces entered the battle of Kobani alongside the Kurds on Syria's northern border with Turkey. Years later, on March 22, 2019, elements of 5th Special Forces Group reached its limit of advance hundreds of miles to the south in the village of Baghouz along the Euphrates river. At that easily recognizable terrain feature in the district of Deir Ezzor, seven SF operational detachments and 3,000 Syrian Defense Force fighters neutralized 2,000 jihadist veterans, captured 10,000 more, cleared 15 tons of improvised explosive devices and destroyed the last territorial remnant of the physical Caliphate. Eleven thousand SDF members perished in the

preceding effort to push ISIS from Kobani to Raqqa and then from Raqqa to Baghouz with Coalition forces suffering more than 100 unsung casualties along the way.[01] With that heavy toll in mind, recall the LOA definitions at the top of the page. Though correct, these definitions do not explain what the limit of advance physically and psychologically requires, even in victory, from soldiers who venture there.

The SOF troops, SF detachments and supporting units who served in the Syrian campaign understand the term 'LOA' in a more complete way. For five years, they fought to extract an international, numerically superior force of jihadist veterans from a network of IED-laden urban strongholds. These strongholds were often obstructed by living, breathing entrenchments of unwilling noncombatant hostages or ideologically compelled jihadist family members wearing suicide belts. As the Caliphate's territory shrank, ISIS leaders recreated a Gordian knot of tunnels, explosives, heavy weapons and human shields in one city after another, using terror to control captive populations, delay Coalition operations and strike beyond the battlefield. Thus, to separate ISIS fighters from their human shields and reach their objectives in Raqqa, Hajin and

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A satellite image of the Euphrates River at the border between Syria and Iraq shows the key areas where battles were fought along this natural limit of advance.

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Local villagers show Syrian Democratic Forces and their Coalition partners an entrance to a tunnel built by Islamic State terrorists in their village in Syria's Middle Euphrates River Valley.
U.S. ARMY PHOTO BY STAFF SGT. TIMOTHY R. KOSTER

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Smoke rises in the distance as Islamic State terrorists burn tires throughout the Middle Euphrates River Valley in Syria. The smoke screen, also known as screening fires, is an attempt to disrupt the Coalition forces intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance assets. U.S. ARMY PHOTO BY SGT. MATTHEW CRANE

Baghouz, Coalition SOF units combined the strength to dominate and capture a suicidal enemy with the honor and mercy to spare that enemy in defeat, even at great personal risk. The Coalition to defeat the Islamic State destroyed the physical Caliphate along the Euphrates river, captured its combat power and simultaneously preserved tens of thousands of civilian lives because of the balanced attributes these SF detachments displayed on the narrow way to LOA.

To understand the tightrope these SF detachments walked between strength and restraint, one must understand how ISIS become more concentrated, violent and desperate as their territory shrank. From 2015 to 2019, Coalition forces fought alongside Kurdish irregulars and Arab tribesmen to liberate important Syrian cities like Manbij, Hasakah, Shaddadi and the ISIS capital of Raqqa from Caliphate control. As SDF forces retook each city and pushed jihadist forces further south into Deir Ezzor province, IS commanders used a strategy of interior lines to rapidly concentrate combat power along shorter distances and smaller fronts.[02] Like the red zone of a football field, the districts of northeastern Syria became easier and more critical for the enemy to defend as the Coalition offensive drew closer to the Euphrates River goal line. By the time SDF forces reached the outskirts of Raqqa in May 2017, ISIS had spent several years fortifying the city and terrorizing the inhabitants with a variety of public executions.[03] In reliance on the Coalition's rules of engagement, the Caliphate pressed thousands of Raqqa residents into service as laborers and human shields, dressing many in military clothing to confuse Coalition aircraft and protect IS fighters from precision airstrikes.[04] Many of the civilians who perished in the ensuring struggle died because ISIS prohibited their prior departure.

As SDF soldiers and Coalition advisors fought through Raqqa's outlying districts and towards the 'Old' City through a gauntlet of IEDs and car bombs, ISIS launched terror attacks across the United Kingdom, France, Belgium, Spain, Sweden, Finland and Russia, killing thousands of European civilians in an attempt to forestall defeat and sap Coalition willpower.[05] In October 2017, as fighting in Raqqa drew to a close, SDF commanders coordinated with Arab city council leaders to win release for non-combatants, opening a cease-fire corridor for civilian evacuations.[06] After five months of brutal urban fighting, Coalition SOF honored these agreements in order to evacuate civilians from ISIS positions and preserve human life.[07] They did so with the hard knowledge that many experienced jihadists would use civilian evacuation corridors to escape and fight another day, likely on more favorable ground and at greater risk to SF detachment members and SDF forces.[08] In spite of ISIS perfidy, Coalition forces prioritized the evacuation of civilians over the capture of ISIS fighters when Raqqa fell.[09] Similar Coalition-supported civilian evacuations and cease-fires preserved tens of thousands of civilian lives in subsequent battles, establishing a stark contrast between the Coalition's efforts to aid civilians and the Caliphate's deliberate indifference to their lives.

In the aftermath of Raqqa, ISIS forces rallied in the Middle Euphrates River Valley (MERV), interlocking tunnels, IEDs, heavy weapons and human shields into another complex test of offensive strength and

ISLAMIC STATE LEADERS RECREATED A GORDIAN KNOT OF TUNNELS, EXPLOSIVES AND HUMAN SHIELDS IN ONE CITY AFTER ANOTHER, USING TERROR TO CONTROL CAPTIVE POPULATIONS AND TO STRIKE BEYOND THE BATTLEFIELD.

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Syrian Security Force members prepare to search for improvised explosive devices in Raqqa, Syria. The Islamic State spent several years fortifying the city, forcing Syrian Democratic Forces and Coalition partners to fight through a gauntlet of IEDs and suicide vehicles. U.S. ARMY PHOTO BY SGT. TRAVIS JONES

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Syrian Democratic Forces uncovered hundreds of explosive remnants during clearance efforts across northeast Syria. PHOTO COURTESY OF SYRIAN DEFENSE FORCES

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A Syrian Democratic Forces soldier prepares a 120mm mortar round during a fire mission in the Middle Euphrates River Valley, Syria. U.S. ARMY PHOTO BY SGT. MATTHEW CRANE

humanitarian restraint for SF detachments in Deir Ezzor. As SDF vehicles moved south along the Khabur River and the M7 highway towards the Euphrates, the Caliphate launched raids into Hasakah, suicide bombings along the Khabur valley and spoiling attacks across the Jazeera desert to delay the Coalition advance.[10] Meanwhile, ISIS concentrated tens of thousands of fighters, heavy weapons and technical vehicles into a 100-kilometer string of villages on the northeastern bank of the Euphrates.[11] From the village of Busayrah in the north to Baghouz Fawgani in the south, jihadist engineers transformed a fertile greenbelt of sloped riverside terrain into a network of strongholds. They laced the city of Hajin and the villages of Gharanij, Susah, Marashidah and As-Shafah with hundreds of house-borne IEDs, turning modest homes into fighting positions that would ignite or detonate on entry. The jihadists installed their family members amidst these explosive caches and traps, arming hundreds with assault rifles, explosive vests, grenades and pistols.[12, 13] Finally, ISIS sanctioned execution of any civilians who attempted to leave, invoking previous massacres of Sunni Arab tribesmen to guarantee compliance.[14] Thus, to solve another Caliphate-created human rights dilemma and breach this final chain of strong points, individual SF detachments and their Marine Corps security squads would need to enter each village and either destroy ISIS positions with organic heavy weapons or identify ISIS fighters for Coalition aircraft, entailing a more direct combat role alongside dismounted SDF fighters and a higher degree of risk.[15]

Throughout 2018, 5th SFG(A) Soldiers and their SDF partners fought to isolate and secure individual ISIS strong points, especially the city of Hajin, while external threats sapped Coalition strength and provided ISIS with ripe opportunities to counterattack. In January, the SDF used Coalition-supplied bulldozers to clear IED belts for an infantry advance, swiftly capturing Busayrah and Abu Hamam at the northern end of the MERV. However, the SDF bogged down in brutal battle for Gharanij as ISIS targeted individual bulldozers with suicide vehicles.[16] On January 20, while SDF forces struggled for Gharanij, Turkish President Tayyip Erdogan attacked the Kurdish People's Protection Group (YPG) in the Afrin Canton of northwestern Syria, launching Turkish aircraft, artillery fire and tanks in support of pro-jihadist Arab militia.[17] The attack displaced tens of thousands of Kurdish refugees towards Tal Rifat and drew many SDF members north to defend their families, stripping combat power from the fight against ISIS.[18] During the attack on Afrin, Russian Wagner Group mercenaries and Syrian pro-government militia massed opposite a reduced SDF force in the village of Tabiyeh and prepared to seize the Conoco oilfields some 70 kilometers north of the ISIS front line. On February 7, 2018, Wagner crossed the Euphrates with their Syrian militia partners and attacked Coalition forces at Conoco. Russian officers denied involvement as SOF reinforcements and Coalition airstrikes forced Wagner's mercenaries and Assad's militia back across the river with hundreds of casualties.[19] Taken together, these closely coordinated Russian and Turkish incursions stalled offensive op-

On November 24, a similar ISIS attack broke SDF lines north of Hajin, capturing dozens of SDF fighters alive. Coalition forces reoriented to the northern front and restored SDF lines near the train station for a final push into the city center. As in Raqqa, ISIS used terror to impose delays, converting the Hajin hospital into a fighting position, rigging the protected structure with explosives and calling for terror attacks like the Strasbourg Christmas market shooting in Germany.[24] Despite IS efforts, the SDF secured Hajin on December 14, setting the stage for a final push on the villages of Susah and Baghouz in 2019.[25]

After a year's work to secure Hajin and counter external threats, SF detachments in Deir Ezzor captured the Caliphate's last bastions of Susah, Marashidah and Baghouz in three months of intense springtime

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erations against ISIS for three months.[20]

That summer, when Kurdish strength returned from Afrin and Tal Rifat to Deir Ezzor, a rejuvenated SDF used the Jazeera desert plateau to bypass ISIS defenses in Hajin and envelope the ISIS pocket from the south. In a bold pincer movement, SDF troops captured Little Baghouz in May and Greater Baghouz in September, cutting jihadist access to the Iraqi border at Al-Qaim. Coalition forces set forward artillery positions in the Jazeera desert and detachment mortar positions at the Hajin train station in order to support the close fight. As the SDF squeezed ISIS from both north and south, the jihadists used seasonal sandstorms to launch prepared counterattacks.[21] On Oct. 10th and 27th, ISIS breached SDF lines in Baghouz with car bombs, armored bulldozers and waves of *inghimasi* infantry wearing suicide belts.[22, 23] Columns of technicals with heavy machine guns and 23mm cannons exploited the breach to encircle SF detachments in the Jazeera desert. Two isolated SF teams and their Marine Corps escorts expended a triple basic load of ammunition before their company commander brought French artillery and American airstrikes to bear 'danger-close' through clouds of sleet and sand.

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A Syrian Democratic Forces mortar team manipulates the sight on an M120 mortar system during a fire mission in the Middle Euphrates River Valley, Syria. U.S. ARMY PHOTO BY SGT. MATTHEW CRANE

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A series of screen shots from a video broadcast on the Islamic State media — Al-Barakah/Amaq news — of an IS counterattack in a sandstorm in October 2018.

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Coalition forces launch mortars into known Islamic State territory in Syria. Special Forces Detachments and their Marine Corps mortar crews fired final protective fire for beleaguered SDF units at a rate that induced vomiting and concussions among the mortar crews. U.S. ARMY PHOTO BY SPC. CHRISTIAN SIMMONS

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Syrian Democratic Forces escort a child of a surrendered Islamic State terrorist in Syria. The IS campaign of destruction and brutality destroyed the lives of vast numbers of people and displaced thousands. U.S. ARMY PHOTO BY STAFF SGT. RAY BOYINGTON

combat. In that short span, SF teams and SDF forces defeated a dozen ISIS counterattacks, recovered 32 SDF hostages and evacuated 20,000 noncombatants from Caliphate control. From January to March, the flood of ISIS family members and surrendering foreign fighters required SF teams to shift between combat operations and civilian evacuations. Battalion-size ISIS units assaulting the Coalition cordon often outnumbered SDF defenders by hundreds of fighters at the point of attack. Along the Marashidah Canal outside Baghouz, forward SF detachments and their Marine Corps mortar crews fired final protective fire missions for beleaguered SDF units at a rate that induced vomiting among crew members. As ISIS lost indirect fire weapons, Syrian regime artillery fired salvos across the Euphrates and into SDF units during ISIS breakout attempts.[26] Coalition aid stations became overwhelmed with SDF wounded, so SF team members set aside their weapons to assist Special Operations Surgical Team and Forward Surgical Team doctors between each attack. As an example, during the worst ISIS counterattack from the Baghouz encampment, SF team members personally performed amputations on badly wounded SDF fighters while Air Force and Army doctors resuscitated urgent surgical SDF casualties, treating more than 50 SDF wounded on that single day.[27]

Though the buildings within Hajin, Susah, As-Shafah and Baghouz were severely damaged, Coalition forces repeatedly and successfully separated noncombatants from ISIS fighters by broadcasting civilian evacuation windows during multiple cease-fires, then precisely selecting individual ISIS targets for destruction at the SDF point of attack. The sheer numbers

of surviving civilian evacuees (20,000) and captured ISIS fighters (10,000) testify to the precision and restraint of the Coalition campaign.[28] Arguments to the contrary, like Middle East Institute policy papers that allege humanitarian negligence, present several obvious flaws.[29] They presume Coalition strikes around Baghouz killed thousands of noncombatants, attributing the low number of bodies found there to a cover up rather than an evacuation. The Middle East Institute separately acknowledges that tens of thousands of civilians, ISIS fighters and family members reached Al Hol refugee camp before the fighting ended, a fact easily explained by continuous, successful evacuation efforts during the battle.[30] Acts of terror like the installation of light and motion-activated IEDs in civilian structures or Regime rockets barrages are not addressed as significant causes of battlefield damage or civilian death. Finally, even MEI-cited eyewitnesses clearly differentiate between innocent civilians who fled through Coalition lines before the final conflict and the die-hard ISIS supporters who exited Baghouz involuntarily at the end, threatening SDF first responders with beheading while they received Coalition food and medical aid. The sole named eyewitness relates an incident where "several SDF fighters were killed when fake 'babies' that women were bringing in as IDPs exploded."[31] Personal accounts from SF advisors after the battle revealed the awful truth: female ISIS fighters carried live infants in their arms when they posed as refugees, lured SDF soldiers and then detonated suicide vests.[32]

The strength required for SF detachments to face such atrocities enabled an honorable Coalition victory over those responsible, subduing an enemy bereft of

honor in defeat and mercifully preserving thousands of innocent lives at the limit of advance. In contrast to the cruelty of the terrible episodes mentioned above, SF Soldiers and SDF partners continued moving civilians and Islamic State family members to safety even after IS self-destructively exploited the evacuation. Like the infants used by female IS members to lure SDF troops, most civilians entrapped by IS along the Euphrates river did not choose to venture there. They were compelled by ideology, threats, and when required, by mutilation or execution of their neighbors. These noncombatants were denied food, medical care and freedom by IS for the provision and protection of their captors. It is a grave logical fallacy to blame the SF teams who extricated so many people from peril for it, or to ignore active role of jihadist leaders who sent family members on suicide attacks, threatened medics with decapitation and celebrated murders on other continents even in defeat. Evacuating 20,000 souls from the battlefield at Baghouz would have been impossible without the defeat and capture of their captors, and so this article is also dedicated to the SF team members who defeated IS at the limit of advance. ⬡SW

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

MAJ Morgan Brown is the former commander of Co. B, 2nd BN, 5th SFG(A). Credit for this campaign belongs to the SDF, who bore the cost, to the SF team members who sealed each FLOT breach and to the many other unnamed troops, companies and allies who did the tough work required at Kobani, Manbij, Raqqa, Shaddadi, Conoco, Hajin and Baghouz.

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DIVIDE AND CONQUER

Leading a SFODA on Multiple Fronts.

BY CAPTAIN CALEB REILLY

U.S. Army Special Forces Soldiers, Green Berets, are specially selected for their adaptability, personal responsibility and professionalism. They are trained to represent the Department of Defense and "conduct special operations."[01] Adaptability is the hallmark of the SF Operational Detachment-Alphas. They are organized into 12-man teams, with two of most specialties (*figure 01*). This duality enables ODAs to split into smaller elements, extending their reach and influence at little extra cost in training or manpower. Despite their small numbers, it is this adaptability coupled with rigorous training and teamwork that "allow[s] the detachment commander to employ his detachment in a split-team configuration...each capable of conducting sustained operations at a reduced scale" based on the commander's mission analysis.[02] This capability is critical because it makes ODAs more flexible, effective and unique.

Since their inception in the 1950s, there are only a few contemporary examples of ODAs splitting, the most famous immortalized in Doug Stanton's *Horse Soldiers* and in the 2018 movie *12 Strong: The Declassified True Story of the Horse Soldiers*. On the initial mission into Afghanistan, two ODAs split shortly after infiltration into Afghanistan due to the team's analysis of the mission's requirements balanced against risk. In doing so, the Northern Alliance, partnered with only two ODAs, overthrew the Taliban much more quickly than planners expected.[03] With two small teams capable of splitting into smaller elements, the return on the investment of assessing, training and specially equipping Green Berets is well worth the extra investment by the Army.

As a Detachment Commander with the same ODA for nearly two years, our mission required us to split during two operational deployments, both under vastly different circumstances requiring different organization, manning and equipping of each split element. This article will provide examples and implications of dynamic or deliberate splits, observations on mission analysis considerations and examples forv integrating with conventional Army, Marine Corps and Navy forces. Due to their specialized selection process that selects unique individuals with desirable traits (self-starter, diligence etc.), combined with their extensive training, Green Berets are capable of successfully conducting split-team operations once the proper risk mitigation and enablers are included in the mission planning.

SPLITTING DYNAMICALLY

While deployed to Syria in the winter of 2018 as part of Operation INHERENT RESOLVE, our ODA had responsibility for three distinct, non-mutually supporting lines of effort: patrolling the Forward Line of Troops containing ISIS, establishing an internal security forces base and training ISF trainers for future Syrian Democratic Forces security personnel. Initially, we planned and operated out of the same base; the whole team divided our time and efforts equally among the three LOEs. This worked for a short period of time, but as the situation evolved, we determined that we needed to re-organize to increase our effectiveness and reach.

Several factors informed our decision-making process before we split. First, we determined our communications plan, both for within the team and for all elements interacting with our higher headquarters. This required some creativity and maximization of our

equipment. All members — not just our communications sergeants — learned how to operate the SDN-L (portable system that provides internet and VOIP), use SATCOM, and troubleshoot radios. Second, adjacent units provided additional Special Operations Combat Medics. While most members of the ODA had extensive medical training, operating in smaller elements in an extremely austere environment required the additional expertise. Our team paid particular attention to our proficiency with their medical bags, the location of external medical support and our understanding of medication use. Finally, we determined the distribution of personnel based on skills, experience and personalities.

According to FM 3-18, Detachment Commanders split with their Assistant Operations and Intelligence Sergeant, while the Assistant Detachment Commanders split with the Operations Sergeant.[04] While the doctrine provides a good baseline, commanders must evaluate more than the MOS-specific skills. Two important factors for the team leadership to consider before splitting include personalities and individual skills and qualifications. For example: the training mission was less-likely to be violent, so it did not make sense to send a Special Operations Tactical Air Controller with that split-element. Additionally, we had an individual with exceptional language capabilities and a remarkable aptitude to build rapport with our partner force; he was the natural leader for the training and ISF mission.

The final challenge to overcome was sustaining two separate elements that could operate indefinitely in a split arrangement. This required additional personnel support. One of the SOF Truths is that "most special operations require non-special operations support."[05] Fortunately, we were co-located with a Marine infantry company. After completing mission analysis, we spoke with their company commander, and he task-organized 18 Marines and a Navy Corpsman under

our tactical control. Their specialties included heavy weapons operators, anti-armor infantrymen, mortarmen and an additional SOTAC. We employed the Marines in various roles including gunners, Mission Support Site and patrol base security and mortarmen. The relationship was mutually beneficial because we could not safely conduct aggressive patrols without them, and they received advanced training on disparate weapons systems. Without the additional personnel, maintaining security throughout the patrols while still conducting meetings and providing each team member adequate rest was not feasible to maintain indefinitely. The operations tempo was simply too high. The added personnel support alleviated these concerns and enabled us to continually conduct missions to a high proficiency, while ensuring individuals on the patrol received adequate rest.

Risk analysis and mitigation was key to mission success. Because of the increased risk of smaller elements and deviation from standard procedures, detachment leaders must conduct a sober and probing mission analysis. Ultimately, this makes the team more successful while also protecting Soldiers by manning and equipping to meet contingencies. As General Dwight D. Eisenhower said, "plans are nothing, but planning is everything."[06] Very few of the contingencies we planned for prior to splitting ever came to fruition, but by being prepared for them we ensured mission success. The ODA's

in-depth planning efforts and capability, combined with its distinct ability to adapt, are the hallmarks of not only this mission's success, but the foundation of for subsequent mission success.

SPLITTING DELIBERATELY

In the months leading up to our second deployment in 2019, it became apparent that the mission dictated we needed to split again. This deployment was a Foreign Internal Defense mission training armies in Jordan and Lebanon. The assigned mission forced us to split across two different countries conducting distinct operations. Similarly, we sought to balance mission accomplishment with risk, but the inherent differences between a primarily combat training mission required us to analyze and task organize differently.

By this point, the team's Assistant Detachment Commander, Operations Sergeant, and I had served together in the same roles for a year and a half. Throughout the deployment and multiple training concepts we developed a thorough understanding of each other's strengths and weaknesses, as well as the strengths and weaknesses of the members of the team. For this deployment, it made the most sense for us to split into a more traditional and doctrinal organization. The Assistant Operations and Intelligence Sergeant went with me to the training mission in Jordan, and the Assistant Detachment Commander and Operations Sergeant went to the

FIGURE 01: SPECIAL FORCES OPERATIONAL DETACHMENT-ALPHA TEAM STRUCTURE
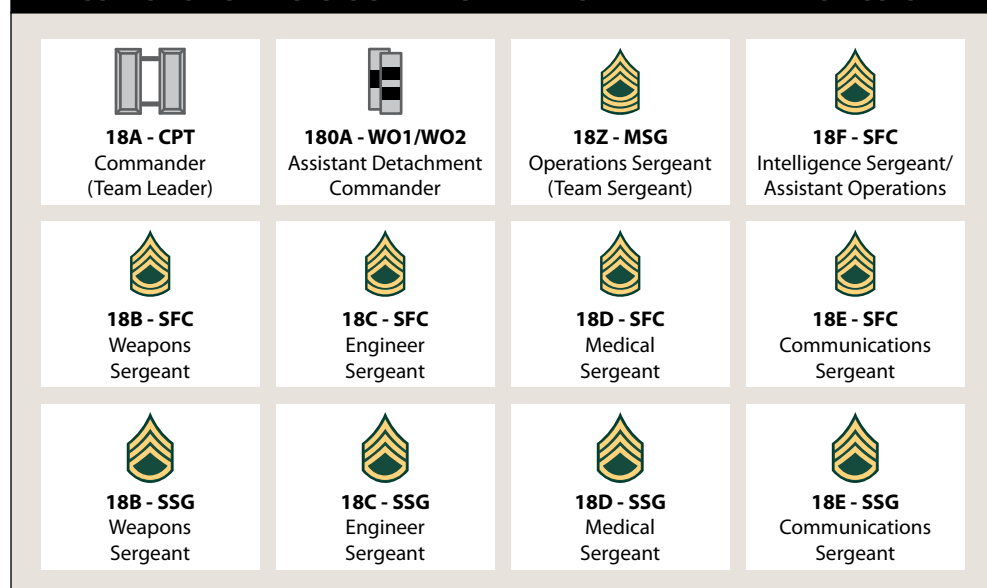
18A - CPT Commander (Team Leader)	180A - WO1/WO2 Assistant Detachment Commander	18Z - MSG Operations Sergeant (Team Sergeant)	18F - SFC Intelligence Sergeant/ Assistant Operations
18B - SFC Weapons Sergeant	18C - SFC Engineer Sergeant	18D - SFC Medical Sergeant	18E - SFC Communications Sergeant
18B - SSG Weapons Sergeant	18C - SSG Engineer Sergeant	18D - SSG Medical Sergeant	18E - SSG Communications Sergeant

training mission in Lebanon. We split the team members based on personality strengths, once again, and those experienced with each foreign army.

Many of the members on the team had experience with the Lebanese army, but fewer had it with the Jordanian army. Many of the Green Berets who went with the split team to Lebanon trained the Lebanese Special Operations Forces two years prior. Included in these are experiences were the Assistant Detachment Commander, and he maintained relationships with many of the senior Lebanese officers with whom he worked in previous years. It made sense to send individuals with experience with the Lebanese Army to Lebanon because we needed to be efficient with the fewer available personnel. Having experience with the LSOF provided the split-team members going to Lebanon with a more thorough understanding of what would be required of them upon arrival in country.

When we task organized and chose individuals to go to Jordan, we likewise weighed individual experiences with Jordanians. One of the members of the team had family in Jordan. While not a native Arabic speaker, he was more proficient than most of us when speaking with Jordanian soldiers. Another member deployed to Afghanistan alongside Jordanian Special Operations Forces and therefore understood how the Jordanians operate in combat environments. Due to their past experiences, they were obvious fits for coming to Jordan.

An additional consideration was the diversity of forces and training at the LSOF school where we were assigned. The LSOF had a dozen courses for which we helped develop programs of instruction, manning and resourcing requirements. Our partner in Jordan was primarily a single JORSOF unit. While the higher-level engagements on this operation required more senior, mature advisors, it also meant that we were able to provide additional team members to advise the LSOF.

Finally, we requested additional Army support through our parent battalion prior to deploying. These support personnel included movement specialists, satellite communication specialists, and additional technical support person-

01

nel. As soon as we received the support personnel, we provided them advanced medical, drivers and marksmanship training to ensure their proficiency. Upon deploying, both split elements trained our support personnel on heavy machine guns, anti-armor and explosives. Once again, the deployment proved to be mutually beneficial as the support personnel learned how to contribute to a split-ODA and became more proficient with various weapons systems. Additionally, this was the first deployment for more than half of our support personnel, providing them with a valuable experience to perform their duties in a deployed setting.

MISSION COMMAND

Mission Command is critical to the success of this kind of task organization. Mission Command is "the exercise of authority and direction by the commander using mission orders to enable disciplined initiative within the commander's intent to empower agile and adaptive leaders in the conduct of unified land operations."[07] Commanders use mission command to provide unity of effort to the unit; through the commander's intent commanders provide subordinates with the "why" behind their mission.[08] Green Berets are exceptional Soldiers, and if they are provided with a clear commander's

intent along with left and right limits, then they will exceed the commander's expectations nearly every time.

It is critical, however, for the team to conduct training with the mindset that it will be forced to split. During team training events, the Engineer Sergeant should teach classes on communications equipment; the Weapons Sergeant should teach breaching charges construction; and the Medical Sergeant should teach classes on heavy machine guns. The ODA leadership—along with the 18F—should teach classes to the entire detachment on the Military Decision Making Process, and explain the factors that go into decisions that the team leadership makes. Not only does this prepare the team members for when they are in the leadership roles, it provides them with a better understanding of the way the leadership thinks, increasing the effectiveness of mission command when they are operating split from the leadership. The first time an ODA splits and trains disparate systems and processes should not be in a combat environment.

RESPONSIBILITY

On the ODA I have the pleasure of serving, the Assistant Detachment Commander and Operations Sergeant have a combined total years of experi-

01
A Special Forces Detachment Member trains a Syrian Democratic Forces fighter on mortar employment. U.S. ARMY PHOTO

ence inside SF of more than 25 years. Prior to the first time we split, I had a total of *almost* three months experience inside SF. The second time we split, I had a total of *almost* 18 months on an ODA. It would be a catastrophic mistake to pretend that I had all of the answers. However, at the end of the day, it is critical to note that the Detachment Commander is responsible for everything the unit does or fails to do. He should not hold an internal debate on whether to split, who should do what and how the team should accomplish the mission. It is important for commanders to be humble enough to gather knowledge from the team, but ultimately recognize that the deci-

• Establish the split team's battle rhythm. The Detachment Commander is responsible for what both elements are doing, so he must remain abreast of all the team has done. Timely and accurate reporting between the split elements will alleviate many problems before they arise. Ensure that the requirements established are not onerous so that the split elements are still able to accomplish their assigned mission and are not more concerned with typing up lengthy, involved reports.

• Gain buy-in from the individuals on each split element for their split element's missions. Individual actions will carry even more weight on a split team, and each member will need to be fully

levels, from the tactical to strategic levels. ODAs should train split on their own, and higher-level commanders should incorporate split-team training events into pre-mission training and external evaluations. These events give confidence not only to higher level commanders that their units of action will be able to accomplish the assigned mission, but more importantly instill confidence and pride in the ODA that successfully meets the challenge. As teams conduct mission analysis that might involve a split, assess the skills, personality and experiences of each team member against the assigned mission. Weigh the personnel responsibilities

IT IS CRITICAL FOR THE TEAM TO CONDUCT TRAINING WITH THE MINDSET THAT IT WILL BE FORCED TO SPLIT ... IT PROVIDES THEM WITH A BETTER UNDERSTANDING OF THE WAY THE LEADERSHIP THINKS, INCREASING THE EFFECTIVENESS OF MISSION COMMAND WHEN THEY ARE OPERATING SPLIT FROM THE LEADERSHIP.

sion to split is the commander's decision to make. Gather the facts, mitigate risk and make the choice. Demand open dialogue from the ODA leadership; commanders make good decisions based on good information.

LESSONS LEARNED

Splitting an ODA is always complex, and no organization will be perfect. Although experience is the best teacher, it is also possible — and even preferable — to learn from other's experiences. In keeping with that, the following is a list of a few areas where we could have improved sooner:

• Incorporate the partner force into your operations— especially security — as soon as possible. It is uncomfortable at first, but once rapport with the individual partners is established, they have a vested interest in the team's protection and success. The benefit gained from the additional individuals freed will be immediately felt. Suddenly instead of requiring three Green Berets to pull security for the element, one can be assigned to oversee four or five partner forces, while the other two can manage more complex tasks.

vested in order to be successful. When each man is fully vested in the mission, he will perform to his highest abilities.

• Provide guidance, and get out of the way. Establish a schedule for in-progress reviews to steer planning priorities and ensure that all are working towards the same end-state. This eliminates confusion and minimizes the amount of excess work conducted in a direction the leadership does not want the team to go. Tamping down on any potential internal frustrations that could arise is key to success in any organization, but especially within a split-ODA where every member must operate at a high level.

CONCLUSION

Splitting an ODA provides great flexibility to SF Commanders at all

with contingencies, additional sustainment risks, and additional support requirements to further mitigate risk. Communicating and mitigating risks along all aspects of the mission enables the Team Leadership — and ultimately the Detachment Commander — to make well-informed decisions on how best to split the team and accomplish multiple, non-mutually supporting missions. (SW)

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

CPT Caleb Reilly joined the Special Forces Regiment in the Fall of 2017. Since then, he has served in 5th Special Forces Group (Airborne) as an MFF Detachment Commander, Assistant Operations Officer, and as the Group HHC Commander. He has various combat and operational deployments to the EUCOM and CENTCOM AORs.

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OCCAM'S RAZOR

Rectifying the North and East Syrian Narrative.

BY MAJOR ANTHTONY M. WERTZ

— OCCAM's RAZOR —

A principle stated by the Scholastic philosopher William of Ockham (1285–1347/49):

Pluralitas non est ponenda sine necessitate —
"Plurality should not be posited without necessity"...
of two competing theories, the simpler explanation of an entity is to be preferred.[01]

THE SCENE

Autumn 2018: the United States-led international coalition against the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria squeezed the so-called caliphate's territorial claims to a mere 200 square miles, confined along Syria's Middle Euphrates River Valley.[02] The U.S. – Syrian Democratic Forces Coalition was lethally potent and gaining ground. Population centers across North and East Syria were in various stages of rebuilding and returning to normalcy after their liberation from ISIS rule. The Combined Joint Task Force – Operation Inherent Resolve's senior leadership recognized ISIS's impending demise, but understood ISIS would fanatically defend those last 200 miles. CJTF-OIR maintained tactical control over Special Operations Joint Task Force-Operation Inherent Resolve, and tasked SOJTF-OIR with the physical destruction of ISIS as the SDF's primary partner. By October however, SDF fighters withdrew from the MERV to defend their families and homes against the Turkish artillery bombardment along the Syrian border 230 miles to the north.[03] Additionally, the ISIS propaganda machine still mass-produced attractive content for global distribution, despite its land loss. These issues presented SOJTF-OIR a substantial challenge within the information environment.

The question of gaining a position of information advantage was

not new when the SDF halted MERV offensive operations. Psychological Operations assessments up to that point revealed a holistic messaging deficit emanating from NES. Syrian media cells belonging to the SDF, local internal security forces (referred to here as police), and local civil councils were not interconnected and thereby self-absorbed; they cared only about messaging their immediate and ethnically-singular populations, some at a rate of less than a message per day. Major General Patrick Roberson, the SOJTF-OIR Commanding General, recognized these endemic narrative, branding and messaging problems when he took command in July 2018. Why were the Syrian Democratic Forces' messaging efforts so weak? Too few media cells?..outdated equipment or practices?..digital platforms without credibility?..bland, non-compelling content?..mixed messaging? With no inter-media cell cooperation, no operational-level coordination function for SDF information, and no unified NES narrative, can the coalition move the international community to rally behind the SDF's destruction of ISIS on behalf of the world?

THE PLAN

Company C, 8th Psychological Operations Battalion's (Airborne) "Copperheads" deployed to SOJTF-OIR the week after Maj. Gen. Roberson took command. Organized into two Tactical PSYOP Detachments, each TPD deployed forward from Kuwait to support SOJTF operations in separate countries: TPD 8C10 in Iraq and TPD 8C20 in Syria. Supporting both TPDs from Kuwait, the C/8

01

Syian Democratic Forces march in formation during a victory ceremony to celebrate the liberation from ISIS.
U.S. ARMY PHOTO BY STAFF SGT. RAY BOYINGTON

PSYOP Publicly Available Information Exploitation Cell, or PPEX, monitored the digital Information Environment to provide near real-time friendly and adversary messaging observation. Given the observed lack of an SDF voice, confirmed by the Copperhead PPEX, Maj. Gen. Roberson decided to reposition the company commander forward to Syria within a month of C/8's arrival in theater. The orders were simple: advise and assist the SDF operational messaging to reach world audiences before ISIS is gone. Considering the US-SDF partnership's solidification in late 2016, one would expect some extant messaging apparatus already within the SDF.

Undoubtedly, TPD 8C20 was not at square one. The Special Operations Task Force – Syria, built on a Special Forces Battalion, consistently had Civil Affairs and PSYOP forces attached while advising the SDF. Often complementary, CA's and PSYOP's previous work established relationships, resourced eligible partner units, and advised those partners with techniques and practices alongside their Special Forces counterparts; SOTF-S's prior PSYOP units already created the required relationships across the SDF. But no one in the SDF knew who was in charge of their messaging due to internal leadership change-outs.

The result was a lack of SDF messaging efficacy and competing SDF Information Operations units like the SDF Press and the Media and Information Center. Understanding that this singular phenomenon left a leadership and management vacuum above all the disparate NES and SDF media cells, and that its effects were divided, inconsistent NES narratives inaudible to the global community, the Copperheads sought to unify their approach to rectify the gap.

As in any operation, a plan formed to logically organize the SDF's headless IO efforts. TPD 8C20 devised an ambitious, yet simple campaign of overlapping steps (*see figure 01, page 44*) that would occur throughout the entirety of NES at the same time, initially focused on the SDF. TPD 8C20's six Tactical PSYOP Teams enabled this simultaneity, as they were the primary custodians of partner-force media cell relationships and were physically spread across NES's reclaimed population centers. Already maintaining advise, assist, and equip relationships with the majority of all existing SDF, police and civil council media cells, the TPTs facilitated the first regional media cell meetings — veritable Information Operations Working Groups. The Copperheads put the plan into action on September 24 with the first IOWG in Manbij.

MAP 01

SYRIA ISSUE

As planned, the IOWGs enabled numerous concurrent actions: NES's IO network reconstruction and reinforcement; inter-media cell trust and reliance; NES narrative campaign planning; best-practices sharing; and new media cell generation (only as needed). Meanwhile, the TPD command team focused on removing SDF-internal competition between the SDF Press and the MIC. Inadvertently pitted against each other for scarce SDF resources and the pride of U.S. partnership, the TPD converted their partners' thought processes to realize they should be complementary offices. With deeper understanding that the SDF Press originally existed to control all SDF media cells, which outnumbered police and civil council media cells, the prime leadership position naturally fell to its director.

The plan, led by C/8's PSYOP practitioners, started strong. Given its multi-faceted approach, it would require a larger U.S. team to maintain success. The C/8 company commander requested specific military occupational specialties in support. SOTF-S provided resources, personnel (in concert with SOJTF-OIR), and physical placement to build the team and support the plan. By early November, SOTF-S spawned a new and unique cross-functional team out of TPD 8C20's efforts. With two other PSYOP Soldiers, the C/8 commander now had three Public Affairs personnel and a Civil Affairs Team attached to form "CFT-Influence." Coupled with C/8's persuasive capability, the addition of PA's intrinsic public information and community engagement capabilities, along with CA's charter to energize stability through governance support, the initiative created an advisory team with significantly greater potential to achieve the desired positive effects. Working in unison with the TPTs (and the SOJTF-OIR/SOTF-S J39 Team to guarantee unity of effort), CFT-Influence primarily partnered with the SDF Press Director, advising and accompanying him as he took larger responsibility to reverse NES's messaging deficit.[04]

FIGURE 01
C/8 POB (A)'s campaign plan to rebuild the SDF's operational messaging.

OBSERVED EFFECTS

The first 31 days of plan execution saw TPD 8C20 and CFT-Influence focused on persuading the SDF to correct their organizational shortcomings and subsequently advising them to act toward mutual NES goals. Thus, the plan's effect on the SDF was their operational-messaging apparatus's stark progress beyond its prior disorder. Advances in that first month included:

- Two local and three regional IO-WGs transpired (two spontaneously without direction from SDF or C/8 leadership)
- SDF, police, and civil council media cells began direct liaison at the local levels, self-initiating:
  – Mutual amplification for one another's messaging.
  – Joint content production and event coverage.
  – Media-related capabilities expansion via reciprocal training.

- Raqqa's media cell contingent coordinated the first anniversary celebration for the Raqqa Liberation, enlisting media cells from across NES to support event administration and message internationally — because of their publicity efforts, more than 3,500 Syrians attended the celebration
- The SDF Press Director:
  – Resurrected the SDF Spokesman's weekly output after a period of silence greater than six months.
  – Personally managed limited training and equipment allocations to the media cells most in need.

A truly organized SDF IO unit emerged as the SDF Press Director recognized and acted upon his responsibility to serve as the functional coordinator for all SDF media cells, their actions, and output.

FIGURE 01

A2E
A3E
A3E
A2E
A3E
A2E
A3E

1 Seed the Network (Gain Conceptual Buy-in)

2 Standardize Narrative

2 Provide Messaging Solutions **3**

2 SYNC THE MESSAGE

1 Plan and Train

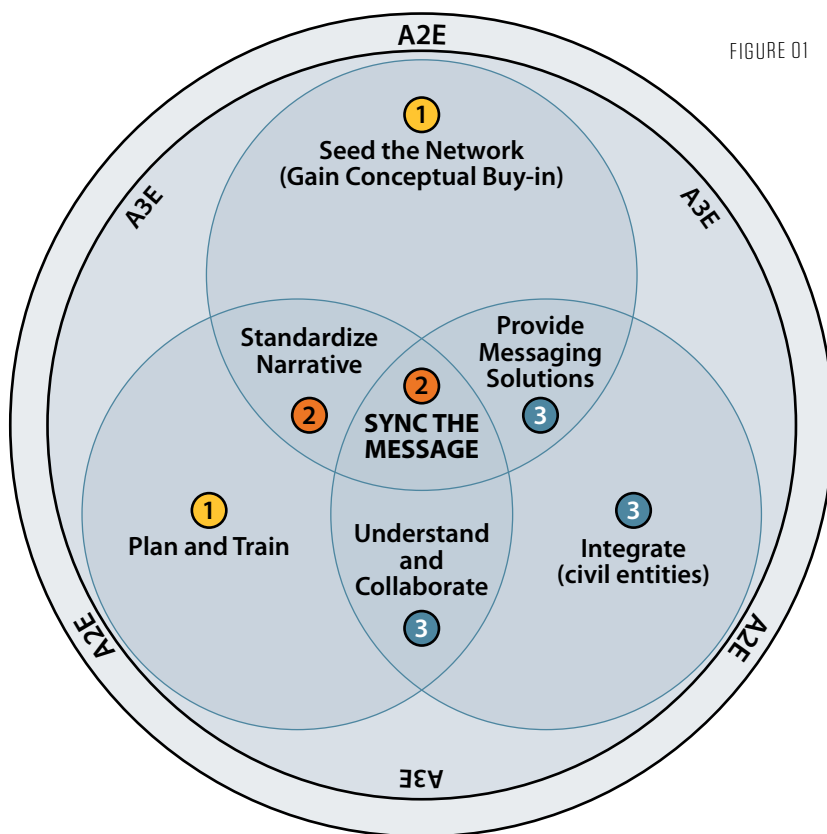Understand and Collaborate **3**

Integrate (civil entities) **3**

1 Strengthen Extant / Cultivate Future Partnerships
2 Standardize Messaging Framework
3 Merge with NES's Strategic Purpose and Goals

FIGURE 02: SYRIAN DEMOCRATIC FORCES UNIFIED NARRATIVE PLAN

Who We Are: Our local governance, the Syrian Democratic Council, rebuilt our cities and towns after ISIS's destruction; we seek to define a peaceful future with our regional and global partners.

Why We Fight: Our army, the Syrian Democratic Forces, liberated us from fear and brutality, defeating the scourge of ISIS for our benefit and that of the World's peoples.

Where We Came From: The people of North and East Syria are unified in the human struggle for decency and connectedness.

Human / Capable / Resilient

» Moving Home	» Establishing Communities	» Working the Land
» Raising Family	» Opening Business	» Living Peacefully
» Repairing Destruction	» Clearing Waste	

Improving / Stable (simultaneous to ISIS's defeat)

» Schools Opening	» Town Halls	» "Police" and SDF operations
» Medical Care	» Trash Removal	» Clean Water Projects
» Sewage Repair	» Electricity Provision	

United / Inclusive

» Civil Demographics	» Police / SDF Demographics	» Cross-training
» Governmental Structures	» Martyrs	» Democratic Ideals

Free of ISIS / Secure

» Shaddadi: 2.5 years after liberation	» Manbij: 2 years after liberation	» Raqqa:1 year after liberation
» MERV: more and more each day	» Eradicating ISIS for the world	

Deserving of Recognition

» Social Charter	» Governance Structures	» Party Ideals
» Elections Process and Turn-out	» Actions on behalf of the world	» Inclusivity

FIGURE 02 **SDF's unified narrative plan with subordinate themes and messages (recreated).**

Seeking to co-opt the NES civil sector, the SDF Press Director understood his position as the SDF Commander's trusted agent to liaise with the Syrian Democratic Council– the centralized body to coordinate governance support to the local civil councils. He drafted, and amassed buy-in for, a unified NES narrative — one that depicted an inclusive society immersed in the human struggle for decency, stability and connectedness; defending their livelihoods from the scourge of ISIS; and eradicating the extremist threat on behalf of the global community (*see Figure 02*). With SDC agreement on their foundational message, the SDF Press Director built the SDC media center's capacity by leveraging the SDF Press's human capital to train and expand SDC media personnel. For the first time, NES Information Operations were a concerted effort between the SDF and SDC. With new found momentum, the SDF Press took full lead; the greater Copperhead team remained alongside as their trusted consultants.

Entering the plan's second month, the reinforced SDF Press network began gaining more of their own effects through the increased quality and quantity of their output. As ISIS continued to shrink from the landscape, amplifying stories about NES efforts to return societal stability became daily tasks. Planned stories, ranging on issues from the health of Internally-Displaced Persons Camps, to schools reclaimed from ISIS's grip and women's initiatives were common subject-matter, and always included the recurrent SDF pledge: We will never rest until ISIS is crushed. The stories, their branding and the advanced content packaging trended highly as the interested audience grew locally and beyond. When the beginning of November provided opportunistic material to proclaim the SDF's dedication and combat competence, the SDF Press surged.

The story, about a massively successful SDF operation, gained a quarter of a million initial views. Within five days, exponential reposts and comments from unassociated civil accounts spawned international news coverage, and

spurred world leaders to comment directly in the discussion. Most effectively, the SDF Press drew in their antagonists with damaging effect: habitual adversarial outlets scrambled to counter-argue, disprove and misinform the story so desperately that their utterly misaligned counter-narrative garnered no noticeable interaction nor an accepting audience. Less than a week later, the SDF Press's planned messaging for another lethal SDF success gained international carrier coverage from 11 major news outlets in less than six hours from their initial press release. Each news outlet's story amplified the message to a significantly wider audience, gaining rapid awareness and interaction. Clearly, the SDF Press tried and proved an effective model, and they would capitalize upon it in the coming months; their successful content, volume and reach would continue long after the Copperheads handed their advisory partnership to successors in mid-January 2019. (Note: The C/8 PPEX monitored both these stories in the digital information environment, enabling the Copperheads to see the SDF Press's true effectiveness.)

A WAY TO IMPROVE

Although this recount mainly focuses on C/8's success with the SDF Press, there were detractors along the way that should not be ignored. Considering C/8's task related to digital information warfare, the entire company (including TPD 8C10 in Iraq) relied heavily on the PPEX in Kuwait. This four-member team consistently worked 18-20-hour days in order to monitor the vastly different information requirements between Syria and Iraq. This immense job required constantly updating manual inputs and searches to guarantee their analytics programs mined relevant thematic data guided by human observation of the digital environment. Providing decompression
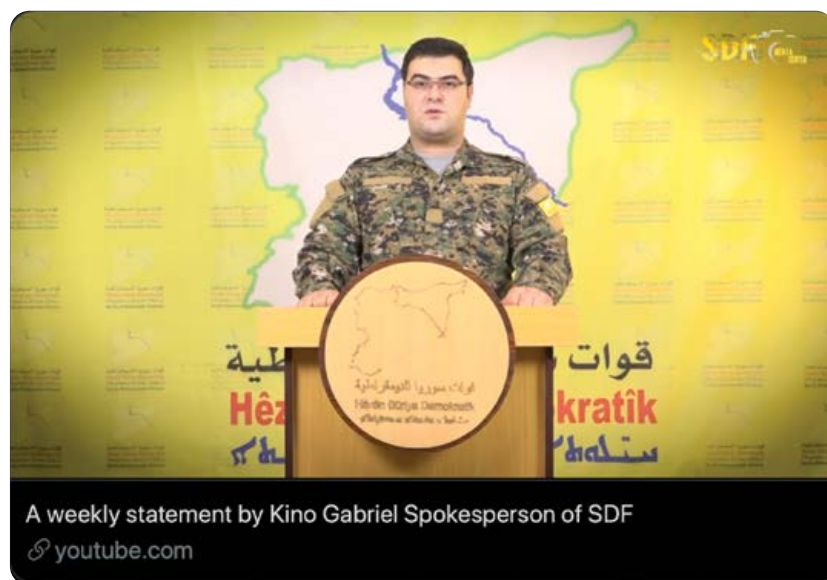
and a sustainable work-rest cycle proved challenging to the small element in charge of sorting through a never-ending propaganda reel of gut-wrenching images. Clearly having more trained personnel (usually unfeasible given force number caps) or exploiting conus-based digital support (currently a burgeoning capability) would solve this issue with current analytics tools. Still, one can see the problem of timeliness to affect the information environment — that is the potential of missed messaging opportunities.

As long as we continue to use the internet and social media as platforms to influence and inform, we should invest in an analytical

suite that can recognize narratives, rather than just thematics. Defining the threat narrative and the friendly narrative within the program, and relying on machine learning to digitize monitoring free of human input could produce multiple benefits: real-time analysis of narrative shifts; immediate identification of where individual messages connect to a narrative (e.g. trends or viral take-offs); warnings or prompts of emergent messaging or counter-narrative opportunities; an additional platform to collect both measures of performance and effectiveness; and the obvious preservation of our most important human assets' well-being. Such a tool

01, 02
The SDF press gained effects through increased quality and quantity of their output, leveraging social media platforms to showcase the SDF's dedication, confidence and success. Their efforts paid off with international news coverage that spurred world leaders to actively engage in the conversation while adversarial media outlets scrambled to counter-argue.

03
Special Operations team members meet with partner forces and community leaders in Raqqa, Syria, to discuss messaging strategy.
PHOTO COURTESY OF CPT DANIEL KNOX

A weekly statement by Kino Gabriel Spokesperson of SDF 19-11-2018
🔗 youtube.com

01

A weekly statement by Kino Gabriel Spokesperson of SDF
🔗 youtube.com

02

03

would significantly reduce response times and ultimately provide PSYOP forces using digital media a better chance to more rapidly gain the position of information advantage by operationalizing the narrative for their supported commander.

CONCLUSION

This account of the SDF Press's 75-day timeline to reorganization and explosive content production began as a set of vexing questions within the coalition. Regardless of the coalition's prior advice, the SDF failed to understand or to care that their external message was non-existent and their internal message was ineffective before August 2018. Yet by early November, they codified an operational-level messaging apparatus — trending towards strategic communication — which organized local and regional information efforts for their population's benefit, and which drew an interested

global audience that continued positive growth the following year. SOJTF-OIR's IO enterprise, led by C/8 PSYOP, enabled this dramatic effect by taking ample — not extensive — time to understand the problem's facets.

Oftentimes we recognize a difficult problem and assume an equally difficult solution must be the cure. In the case of SDF Press, the problem's root cause turned out to be nothing more than a lack of empowered leadership and unified purpose. C/8's ambitious-yet-simple campaign plan arose from observation to confirm (or deny) extant PSYOP and IO assessments; though it worked in this partner force scenario, it may not in future ones. Nevertheless, it provides a pragmatic model for course of action development that any ARSOF Team is trained and able to replicate:

1. Take reasonably adequate time to achieve holistic understanding of the situation or problem.

2. Develop and adopt the least complex solution capable of achieving all goals (i.e. do not fall prey to the lure of over-complication).

3. Amass trust to build the cross-cultural relationship toward mutual goals.

4. Capitalize on the trust-based relationship to advise your partner's enhanced capacity.

In closing, members of Army Special Operations cannot ignore doctrinal planning and problem solving processes...but we can always remember to solve the problem by the most direct route. **SW**

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

MAJ Anthony M. Wertz is a Psychological Operations officer assigned to the USAJFKSWCS Commander's Initiatives Group. He commanded C Company, 8th Psychological Operations Battalion (Airborne) from reactivation in September 2017 through May 2019, leading the company on deployment to SOJTF-OIR in late 2018.

NOTES **01.** https://www.britannica.com/topic/Occams-razor **02.** https://www.nytimes.com/2018/09/11/world/middleeast/isis-syria.html **03.** https://www.reuters.com/article/us-mideast-crisis-syria-turkey/turkish-forces-shell-northern-syria-kurdish-led-force-responds-idUSKCN1N51KO. **04.** CFT-Influence's Civil Affairs Team was CAT 641 from D Company, 96th Civil Affairs Battalion (Special Operations) (Airborne). CFT-Influence's Public Affairs Team was from the 201st Theater Public Affairs Sustainment Element. The SOJTF-OIR J39 Team and SOTF-S J39 Team were comprised of Washington National Guard Soldiers from Teams 4 and 5, Bravo Company, 156th Information Operations Battalion, 56th Theater Information Operations Group.

"THE SDF...CODIFIED AN OPERATIONAL-LEVEL MESSAGING APPARATUS – TRENDING TOWARDS STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION– WHICH ORGANIZED LOCAL AND REGIONAL INFORMATION EFFORTS FOR THEIR POPULATION'S BENEFIT, AND WHICH DREW AN INTERESTED GLOBAL AUDIENCE THAT CONTINUED POSITIVE GROWTH THE FOLLOWING YEAR."

PERSUADE CHANGE INFLUENCE

The Effectiveness of Psychological Operations in the Cross Functional Team.

BY CAPTAIN DANIEL KNOX

The rise of the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria demonstrated the ability of a numerically inferior force utilizing irregular warfare in order to overcome adversity and impose its will upon a population. Throughout the group's occupation of the greater Levant, the fringe propaganda units began to transition to more steady state operations. Utilizing the Al-Furqan Foundation as a Media Production Company, the Islamic State legitimized their actions through the production of high-quality videos, posters and most effectively, a well-maintained internet presence. No longer was the Caliphate limited to the physical boundaries its Soldiers were able to control. It was now able to infiltrate every corner of the world at the speed of an internet connection. The Islamic State had now become the institution it was staving to overthrow.

The amount of ordnance used by the international community in an effort to route the Islamic State is reminiscent of Operation Arc Light and Linebacker in Vietnam. Despite the raw power of the air war, it was unable to reduce the target of the cognitive domain of the ISIS fighter. This fanatical enemy welcomed death, and saw nothing wrong with achieving their goals via the coalition onslaught. This revelation caused the coalition to rethink its tactics. Can you essentially kill an idea as perverse as the Islamic State? This paramount question caused the American military to turn to the members of its Psychological Operations Branch. These men and women of "PSYOP" thrive in the cognitive domain. Through the amplification of non-lethalc effects, these Special Operations professionals came into their own on the modern battlefield through the demonstration of their unique abilities.

Found at echelon of command during Operation Inherent Resolve, the members of PSYOP proved to be vital in the enduring defeat of ISIS. Tactically, the members of PSYOP were embedded within Cross Functional Teams. These teams were compiled of reps from PSYOP, Civil Affairs, Special Forces and even Public Affairs. Able to amplify each other's effects, these CFTs enjoyed noticeable successes throughout OIR. While working with the Special Forces members of the CFT, the members of PSYOP were able to utilize their expertise to enhance recruiting of the partner force. This recruitment drive provided the raw manpower used by the Operational Detachment- Alpha to conduct direct action against the members of ISIS. Developing products such as posters, radio broadcasts, television commercials and handouts ignited the movement and gave hope to those oppressed by ISIS. While assisting in the formation of the groups that would become the Syrian Democratic Forces the members of PSYOP also worked to legitimize the fledgling force.

ABOVE
The logo of the Al-Furqan Foundation for Media Production Company, one of the larger companies within ISIS' media network. ISIS' official media network includes many foundations specializing in the production and dissemination of media materials designed to bolster the morale of its operatives, announce and claim responsibility for military activity, call for enlistment into the organization, and preach jihad against their enemies.

LEFT
Propaganda created by the Al-Furqan Foundation for Media Production Company. Members of the Psychological Operations Regiment proved to be vital in the enduring defeat of ISIS through their mastery of the cognitive domain and ability to accomplish a seemingly impossible task to influence a group of fanatical individuals, while supporting a fledgling state.

Understanding the cognitive domain, PSYOP assisted in creating logos, slogans and other imagery that resonated with the local community. They also created visual and audio products depicting the SDF as the liberating force and solidifying them as a competent entity in the area of operations. In conjunction with the marketing and branding of the American Partner Forces encompassing the nonlethal effects, the members of the PSYOP Regiment were instrumental in the lethal targeting process. Through various means to include the exploitation of Publicly Available Information and techniques found in Military Deception, PSYOP operators were able to exploit the cognitive domain of ISIS and drive direct action and kinetic operations. This constant bombardment of the mental capacity effectively drove a wedge between those fanatical leadership members and the low level soldier. Without a cohort to wield, the Islamic State ultimately became ineffective within the Levant.

Operating with the members of Civil Affairs, the members of the PSYOP Regiment worked hand in hard to secure the victory. Through the leveraging of different capabilities within the Cross Functional Team, the members of PSYOP were able to train, advise, and assist the members of the nascent Government of North East Syria. After the abandonment of the Syrian Regime and the repulsion of the Islamic State from North East Syria, a power vacuum was created, threatening to drive the region into a humanitarian catastrophe. Again, the Psychological Operations operator was called upon to assist both the Civil Affairs Teams, and the State Department with the implementation of the newly formed government. Accompanying the CATs to both local council and NES Governmental meetings the PSYOP members assisted in guiding the internal and, in some cases, external messaging coming from these influential figures. Within the ever increasing humanitarian crisis that was — and in many instances still is — plaguing NES, the State Department and Civil Affairs worked tirelessly to stem the human suffering. Looking inward to the capabili-

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ties of the Cross Functional Team members, the messaging their capabilities became paramount. TPT members were able to create messaging focused on the Internally Displaced Persons scattered throughout the country. The range of messaging directed toward the IPDs varied from such mundane topics as basic hygiene while in State Department IPD camps, to the dangers of the Islamic State. As common sense as these topics may seem, each one supported a grander stage. Due to the large scale insurrection caused by the rapid advancement of ISIS, multitudes of IDPs were strewn throughout NES. At the request of the State Department TPTs crafted messaging directing these impoverished people toward life sustaining services. This messaging was disseminated throughout the region on various mediums in an effort to maximize the effectiveness of the propagation. This messaging proved to be extremely effective, directly resulting in the peaceful and safe transit to these safe zones. While in these camps, these disadvantaged individuals became the target of fanatical recruiters. Exploiting this captive audience already disenfranchised with authority, ISIS recruiters moved about the camps. In an effort to stem the flow of radicalization, TPTs were called upon to influence the population. Due to State Department restrictions, American PSYOP members could not enter the IPD camps. Not comfortable with limitations, TPT members utilized their partner force to propagate anti ISIS material throughout the camps. This was a two pronged effort by the TPTs. On one hand they would be able to assist the greater anti-ISIS campaign by dissuading ISIS recruitment throughout the IDP population. On the other they would be able to legitimize the partner force, and Government of NES by putting a

PARTNERING WITH THEIR SPECIAL OPERATIONS AND CONVENTIONAL PARTNERS, THE MEMBERS OF THE PSYCHOLOGICAL OPERATIONS REGIMENT AMPLIFIED EFFECTS, WHILE SIMULTANEOUSLY FACILITATING BOTH LETHAL, AND NON-LETHAL TARGETING.

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local face on the crisis response. These actions and efforts lead to a minimal recruitment of IDPs into the Islamic State.

Unique to the AO was the formation of an Information Warfare Cross Functional Team. The composition of the team included PSYOP, Information Operations, Civil Affairs and Public Affairs. This unique CFT was partnered with the highest levels of the Syria Democratic Forces Media Cell, The Government of NES Media Cell, and a multitude of civil governments throughout the area. This placement and access provided PSYOP the unique ability to conduct influence operations at the highest level. Serving as surrogate Information Operation Soldiers, the TPTs coordinated messaging through the integration of multiple sources or information related capabilities in order to propagate a de-ISIS narrative. While the Public Affairs Officer was partnered with individuals such as Kino Gabriel, the SDF spokesperson, PSYOP members were able to assist in the crafting of themes and imagery used in their daily address. Through the training and guidance of the members of the CFT, the measures of effectiveness assessed by the PYSOP members were substantial. The tangible effects of the effort can be seen in the increase of social media followers and propagation of pro-SDF and pro-Government of NES information into the international community. Of note, during the initial meeting with the SDF Press, they wielded a sole Twitter account with 111 followers in order to combat the robust international media empire run by ISIS. In the course of roughly four months, this capability grew to multiple official Twitter accounts with upwards of 60,000 followers. In addition, the SDF press was mentored to develop multiple avenues to disseminate the de-ISIS narrative. Through the continued partnership the SDF and NES press was able to effectively control the narrative throughout the region, directly leading to the tactical defeat of the Islamic State. In order to secure the lasting victory, the SDF needed to reach the international community. Again leaning on the PSYOP and PAO Soldiers, the SDF became successful. Through PAO channels, the NES and SDF press was able to propagate the achievements of the SDF into such mediums as Deutsche Welle News in Germany, the South American AP, France 24, and 60 minutes. This event took the SDF and NES Press to the international stage, and thus garnered an increase of support from the international community. Demonstrating the mental agility of the PYSOP Solider, daily engagements transitioned from the tactical realm to the operational, and strategic level. Young PSYOP NCOs were directly responsible for actions that resulted in significant geopolitical ramifications.

The campaign to eradicate the Islamic State posed a unique opportunity for the members of the Psychological Operations Branch. These specialized NCOs and Officers were called upon to accomplish a seemingly impossible task to influence a group of fanatical individuals, while supporting a fledgling state. Partnering with their Special Operations and conventional partners, the members of the Psychological Operations Regiment amplified effects, while simultaneously facilitating both lethal, and non-lethal targeting. The dedicated men and women of the Psychological Operations Regiment were a vital component to the enduring defeat of the Islamic State in Syria. **SW**

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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Join the fight brother, live a true Muslim life.

COUNTERING EXTREMISM ONLINE

Lessons Learned from U.S. Strategic Counter-ISIS Radicalization Programs.

BY CAPTAIN DEVIN QUINN

01

A U.S. Department of State video depicts a young Muslim being targeted by terrorists and questioning their morality. The video is part of an online campaign to target audiences most vulnerable to recruitment by the Islamic State.
SCREEN CAPTURE U.S. DEPARTMENT OF STATE VIDEO

INTRODUCTION

The Islamic State of Iraq and Syria burst onto the scene in 2014 with its blitzkrieg campaign across Northern Syria and Iraq. Analysts were shocked by ISIS' ability to seize and hold large swaths of territory. However, lightning campaigns across the open desert and holding seized territory requires a large number of Soldiers. To acquire these soldiers ISIS turned to a developing technology on the internet and social media. Terrorist groups have always used the internet for recruitment and communication but ISIS industrialized its use. At its height ISIS had more than 75,000 active supporters on Twitter.[01] These supporters were able to radicalize and inspire more than 30,000 foreign recruits to join ISIS and travel to its newly established Caliphate.[02] When the ISIS Caliphate began to collapse, it used its online radicalization network to inspire attacks in the West, like the 2015 shooting in San Bernardino that left 14 dead.[03]

To counter this online radicalization President Barak Obama's Administration turned to the Department of State. In 2016, President Obama issued Executive Order 13721 which established the Global Engagement Center. The GEC is a Department of State entity whose primary mission is to:

"lead the coordination, integration and synchronization of government-wide communications activities directed at foreign audiences abroad in order to counter the messaging and diminish the influence of international terrorist organizations, including the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL)."[04]

To achieve this mission the GEC was given a budget of $80 million, $60 million of which was transferred from the Department of Defense. The GEC was established to replace the Obama Administration's previous attempt at strategic counter-radicalization, the Center for Strategic Counterterrorism Communications, which had been widely criticized as being ineffective.

In this paper I analyze the U.S. Government's counter-radicalization programs against ISIS. In the first part of this paper I review the relevant literature on the subject and identify seven key themes that are critical to the proper execution of a strategic counter-radicalization program against ISIS. In the second part of this paper I use these key themes to conduct a comparative analysis of the counter-radicalization programs employed by the CSCC and the GEC. I conclude this paper with policy recommendations on how the U.S. Government can improve its counter-radicalization programs.

LITERATURE REVIEW

For this literature review I critically examined 13 relevant sources pertaining to the U.S. government's strategic efforts towards counter-radicalization. From this analysis I was able to identify seven key themes pertaining to the U.S. Government's counter ISIS radicalization programs. The following lists and explains each of these key themes.

1) The U.S. Government is not an appropriate messenger for counter ISIS radicalization.

This theme was common across nine of the 13 sources I examined for this literature review. The Office of the Director of National Intelligence noted in a 2016 report

that the U.S. Government lacks credibility in the Muslim world due to several unfavorable foreign policy blunders, the greatest one being the Iraq War. Crystal McFadden, adds that unfavorable statements from U.S. officials, like President Bush referring to the War on Terror as a crusade, can further diminish the credibility of the U.S. Government.[05] Most ISIS supporters have a low, if not hostile, opinion towards the U.S. Government and U.S. attributed counter-radicalization messages will most likely not resonate with them. Most of the sources I examined expressed the need for a source more credible than the U.S. Government to disseminate counter-radicalization messages. One source I examined did refute this theme. Alberto Fernandez, the former head of the CSCC, called the idea of a credible counter-ISIS messenger "a myth" and explained that even al-Qaeda had renounced ISIS.[06] Fernandez insisted there was still a need for the U.S. Government to create and openly disseminate counter-radicalization products.[07]

2) The volume and timeliness of ISIS messages on social media far exceeded the efforts of the U.S. Government.

Nine of the 13 sources examined found that this was a major issue hampering U.S. Government counter-radicalization efforts. Richard Stengel noted that at its height ISIS supporters were able to produce 90,000 pieces of online content per day while the entire U.S. Government counter-ISIS effort was only able to produce 350.[08] The volume of online content can be attributed to the fact that ISIS supporters tend to be more active on social media and manage multiple accounts. Two American ISIS supporters managed 57 and 97 Twitter accounts respectively.[09] On social media, volume matters because it creates an echo chamber, increases credibility, and drowns out any dissent.[10] The sources evaluated cited lack of funding and personnel and the bureaucratic process for developing and disseminating messages as reasons the U.S. Government could not keep up with the volume of ISIS messages. At the height of ISIS messaging in 2015 the CSCC only had a staff of 12 and a budget of $6 million which severely limited its capabilities.[11]

3) Disrupting ISIS messaging is more effective than trying to match ISIS volume.

Several sources, including Greenberg, Kean & Hamilton and Fernandez, argued that disruption of ISIS content is a sufficient way to cut down on its volume. Kean & Hamilton noted that from 2015-2016 Twitter removed 125,000 ISIS accounts for promoting terrorism in violation of Twitter's user agreement.[12] This approach requires a strong relationship between the U.S. Government and the tech industry as social media companies bear the responsibility of barring accounts from their platforms. Some analysts believe that removing terrorists from mainstream social media will drive them to the dark web

where they can't easily be monitored however, Greenberg argues this is beneficial because there is a smaller audience on the dark web to radicalize.[13]

4) Analysis and performance measurement of counter-radicalization campaigns is important for developing the right counternarrative.

Five of the sources analyzed, including Greenberg, ODNI, Bing, McFadden and Katz, argued there is a need for data-driven analysis and performance measurement of both radicalization and counter-radicalization campaigns online. Katz noted that in order to counter a problem you must first study and understand the problem.[14] Early efforts by the CSCC lacked analysis and led to a counter-radicalization strategy that was ambiguous and misleading.[15] Greenberg argues for the use of data-analytics to measure the performance of counter-radicalization campaigns so that they can be adjusted if they are not working.[16] The ODNI noted that data-driven target audience analysis can help to target messaging more efficiently.[17]

5) Targeted messaging is more effective than broad messaging.

Five sources; Greenberg, Williams, ODNI, Kean & Hamilton and Fernandez, all observed that targeted messaging is far more effective at counter-radicalization than broad messaging. Kean & Hamilton note that the reasons for radicalization vary with each individual, making broad counter-radicalization ineffective.[18] Fernandez notes that the most effective counter-radicalization messaging is personalized.[19] An example of personalized counter-radicalization occurred at West Point where students posed as ISIS members online to lure potential recruits away from the organization.[20] By analyzing different demographics, messages can be developed to target the specific vulnerabilities and grievances that lead to radicalization.

6) The content of the counter-radicalization message matters.

Crafting counter-radicalization messages with the right content is critical to their effectiveness. Greenberg and Williams noted that the most effective counter-radicalization narratives included testimony from ISIS defectors who were disillusioned by their experiences. Another effective technique observed by Williams and Fernandez was to highlight discrepancies is ISIS's own radicalization narratives. Additionally, Greenberg and Fernandez both proposed that any effective counter-narrative needs to be fact based. Finally, Greenberg and McFadden noted it is important to incorporate alternative narratives rather than only offering negative messages that tell potential recruits not to join ISIS, but offer no alternatives.

AT ITS HEIGHT ISIS SUPPORTERS WERE ABLE TO PRODUCE 90,000 PIECES OF ONLINE CONTENT PER DAY WHILE THE ENTIRE U.S. GOVERNMENT COUNTER-ISIS EFFORT WAS ONLY ABLE TO PRODUCE 350.

So much of this, it doesn't seem right.

01

7) Partnering with industry and allies will boost counter-radicalization messaging

Eight of the 13 sources analyzed called for the U.S. Government to integrate and coordinate with both industry and allies. Parker & Roger note that any form of counter-radicalization communication requires support from non-security stakeholders including companies and private citizens.[21] Bing observes that partnering with technology companies can help the U.S. Government develop better tools for countering radicalization online.[22] In 2015, the DoS and Department of Homeland Security partnered with Facebook to launch the Peer to Peer: Challenging Extremism program which crowd sourced novel counter-radicalization techniques from colleges and universities around the world.[23] The U.S. Government Accountability Office praised government efforts to collaborate with middle eastern allies and train partner militaries in counter-radicalization techniques.[24] As someone who has trained partner militaries in these techniques I can attest that it is a much more viable and enduring option than U.S. Government direct counter-radicalization messaging.

COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

In 2011, President Obama issued Executive Order 13584 which established the Center for Strategic Counterterrorism Communications. In 2013, the CSCC's Digital Outreach Team launched its U.S. Government attributed Twitter account as a platform to disseminate counter ISIS radicalization material and directly engage with ISIS sympathizers and supporters.[25] The CSCC used this platform to launch its "Think Again, Turn Away," counter-radicalization campaign which was aimed at discouraging potential recruits from joining ISIS.[26] The campaign sent tweets like "ISIS recruits order book *Islam for Dummies*," and "*Drugs in ISIS HQ*," in an attempt to show discrepancies in ISIS's narrative.[27] The campaign was broad, U.S. attributed, and failed to demonstrate any analysis or understanding of the target audience or its own messaging. The CSCC also attempted to use its Twitter account to conduct more targeted messaging by engaging in snarky banter with ISIS supporters. This technique was widely criticized because it gave obscure ISIS supporters more clout by allowing them to engage in verbal combat with the U.S. Government.[28] Additionally, the CSCC account could not match ISIS's volume on Twitter as it only sent an average of six to seven tweets per day to its 7,300 followers while some pro-ISIS accounts sent as many as 125 tweets per day.[29]

The biggest CSCC gaff came in 2014 when it released the video "Welcome to ISIS Land."[30] This product was a mock recruiting video that encouraged its watchers to "Run, don't walk to ISIS Land."[31] Although the video was widely circulated, receiving over 900,000 views, it was also heavily criticized by Western journalists for its sarcastic nature.[32] The video showed the CSCC had no comprehension of how Westerners were recruited into ISIS.[33] The CSCC attempts at counter-radicalization violated nearly every key theme identified in the literature review. The CSCC used a U.S. Government attributed platform, could not keep up with ISIS's volume, inadvertently promoted rather than disrupted ISIS messaging, was too broad, lacked analysis and had poor content. As a result, the CSCC was widely seen as a failure.

The failure of the CSCC prompted President Obama to issue Executive Order 13721 in 2016 which established the Global Engagement Center. President Obama sought to correct the failures of the CSCC by ensuring the GEC

would coordinate interagency support, build partner capacity, and develop analytical models to assess its performance.[34] With a budget and staff 10 times the size of the CSCC the GEC hired tech companies to develop tools to ensure it engaged in counter-radicalization programs that were driven by analysis.[35] A good example of this new analytical based approach is a recent counter-radicalization program the GEC ran in North Africa. Using the "Redirect Method" developed by Google's Jigsaw the GEC purchased Facebook ads that targeted young men in Tunisia and Morocco who frequently searched for terrorist propaganda online.[36] The Facebook ads included a video of an ISIS recruit who quickly becomes disillusioned with his experiences on the frontlines.[37] This new method allows the GEC to only target those most vulnerable to recruitment and adjust the narrative based on feedback from different demographics.[38]

The GEC's new approach seems to have remedied the deficiencies of the CSCC and meets the key themes identified in the literature review. The new Facebook ads bear no U.S. logo and although the GEC continued to operate an attributed Twitter account until October 2019 the new head of the GEC, Lea Gabrielle, has shifted the priorities of the GEC away from attributed messaging.[39] The GEC no longer tries to compete with ISIS's volume and instead focuses on targeted messages. The GEC has heavily invested in analytic technology and trains other U.S. agencies and allies how to use it. The GEC uses this analysis to create content that is pertinent and persuasive. The GEC has received some criticism for losing talent and being too bureaucratic but it is a vast improvement over the CSCC.[40]

CONCLUSION

Since the creation of the GEC in 2017, new threats have emerged. The National Defense Authorization Act of 2019 broadened the GEC's mission to include identifying and countering state and non-state actor influence operations and today nearly 75 percent of the GEC's budget is spent countering Russian misinformation.[41] Psychological Operations professional should understand, appreciate, and leverage other organizations throughout the U.S. Government who are conducting influence operations. To that end, U.S. Army Psychological Operations needs a seat at the GEC table as it is the closest thing the U.S. Government has to a strategic influence entity. Ideally, PSYOP should establish a permanent working group within the GEC that is staffed with representatives from each PSYOP battalion. This will ensure that PSYOP is integrated into the interagency coordination on influence that the GEC facilitates. Additionally, the rise of Great Power Competition has revealed that our greatest competitors operate across all Geographic Combatant Commands. A working group comprised of PSYOP professionals from each GCC can ensure that opportunities to counter Chinese and Russian influence are coordinated globally. Positioning this working group within the GEC ensures that PSYOP professionals have immediate access to interagency partners which can amplify PSYOP effects. Finally, all PSYOP professionals can benefit from the key themes for online counter-radicalization

identified in this paper. As new programs and authorities emerge that shift PSYOP professionals focus online these themes can be applied broadly to any online PSYOP activity. Applying the lessons learned here to future operations can help to ensure mission success. 🛡

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In the Heart of the Caliphate

Civil Affairs Support to Phase IV in Raqqa, Syria

**BY CAPTAIN MIKE MEIER AND
SERGEANT FIRST CLASS ABIGAIL SANDLING**

In November 2017, Special Operations Forces Civil Affairs Teams deployed to Syria to support Phase IV Stabilization Operations. The Civil Affairs Team on the ground in Raqqa faced complex and unique conditions that forced the team to adapt creative and flexible solutions to accomplish their mission. Through collaborative partnerships with the Raqqa Civil Council, the U.S. Department of State, and other coalition entities, the team assisted in dilution of ISIS influence and the re-establishment of governing functions within Raqqa.

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The team leader for Cross-functional Team - Raqqa addresses concerns with local citizens returning home to Raqqa following the defeat of ISIS in the area. U.S. ARMY PHOTO BY SGT TRAVIS JONES

BACKGROUND

Located on the banks of the Euphrates River, Raqqa was once a vibrant and bustling city. In 2013, control over Raqqa changed hands three times: from the Syrian Regime, to the Syrian armed opposition, finally, to ISIS. In March 2013 Syrian armed opposition capitalized on the Syrian Regime's overconfidence of its support base within the city. It was the first provincial capital in history to be seized away from the Syrian Regime.[01] The initial establishment of democratic governance in place of President Bashar Hafez al-Assad brutal totalitarian rule appeared to indicate a positive change for the future.

However, in hindsight, the movement was destined to fail. The Syrian opposition comprised of too many social bases, shifting allegiances and ties to transnational social movements. The opposition's movement was crippled by their inability to agree on any cohesive governing platform, and a failure to provide adequate security for the people of Raqqa. By November 2013, ISIS exploited the growing schisms between the opposition forces.[02] ISIS fighters capitalized on the opposition's weaknesses by using a 'divide and conquer' strategy over local competitors. Within a matter of months, ISIS forced the opposition forces out of Raqqa and claimed it as the capital of the ISIS Caliphate.[03]

Over the next four years, the ISIS Caliphate strengthened and expanded, as the group implemented an extensive bureaucracy that notoriously enforced a strict interpretation of Salafist Sharia Law. While the initial occupation of ISIS fighters enhanced security and provided an influx of money, it wasn't long before ISIS' ruthless repression measures, and a semblance of administrative services created a system of competitive control. Foreign fighters from various Middle-Eastern nations, North Africa, the Caucuses, Europe and even North America, flooded into Raqqa to join the Islamist movement. The city served as the ISIS governmental headquarters and its operations center for planning the expansion and defense of the physical caliphate.

Beginning in 2016, the Syrian Democratic Forces, a coalition of Kurdish and Arab militias, supported by U.S.

advisors and assets, conducted offensive operations to liberate population centers from ISIS control. In June 2017, the SDF initiated an assault on Raqqa that lasted more than four months and resulted in pushing ISIS out of the city. While Raqqa's liberation was undoubtedly a significant military accomplishment, it came at a cost. According to a report submitted to the United Nations Security Council in April 2018, the fight over Raqqa destroyed 70-80 percent of the city. All essential services were rendered completely inoperable, and an unprecedented number of mines and unexploded ordnance emplaced by ISIS threatened civilians in the city.[04]

MISSION

As the SDF and U.S. advisors continued to drive ISIS fighters further east down the Middle Euphrates River Valley, Special Forces Operational Detachments Alpha and Civil Affairs Teams followed closely behind. Special Forces teams assumed the mission to develop, train and advise Internal Security Forces that would hold the critical population centers liberated from ISIS. These partner forces were the primary entities responsible for security operations in and around the former ISIS strongholds.

The mission for Civil Affairs Teams was to conduct Phase IV stability operations in support of locally administered civil councils. Stability operations are doctrinally described as the, "overarching effects created by activities of the United States Government outside of the United States. U.S. representatives utilize one or more instruments of national power to minimize, if not eliminate, economic and political instability and other drivers of violent conflict across five U.S. Government stability sectors: security, justice and reconciliation, humanitarian assistance and social well-being, governance and participation and economic stabilization and infrastructure."[05]

Civil councils located across northeastern Syria in Afrin, Jazeera, Tabqah, Manbij, Deir Ezzor and Raqqa, comprised of a mix of Kurdish and Arab entities. The councils, established and administered under the umbrella of The Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria (Rojava), were led by the Syrian Democratic Council, the political wing of the SDF. The SDC's mission statement outlines the establishment of a secular and decentralized system for all of Syria. As ISIS had previously capitalized on weak security apparatus and the governing body's inability to provide essential services to gain influence within Raqqa, it was critical for Civil Affairs and SOF entities to partner with the civil councils to provide resources and training for the re-establishment of local security and restoration of essential services.

Simultaneously, the Department of State's Syrian Transition Assistance and Response Team-Forward assumed the overall lead of stabilization efforts within northeastern Syria. START-FWD's locally vetted implementing partners postured to take action immediately upon the liberation of previously held territory. START-FWD's mission emphasized stabilization and early recovery efforts focused on restoring essential services such as water, electricity and the removal of explosive remnants of war. Its mission and goals also supported strengthening local governance and civil society through the establishment of an accountability framework, with the end goal to support reconciliation and reintegration efforts and improve local capacity for long-term sustainability.[06]

THE CHALLENGE

The Syrian mission provided a new challenge for every SOF team on the ground — particularly the teams located in Raqqa. A large amount of explosive remnants of war lay in wait for unsuspecting victims who attempted to return home after Raqqa's liberation.[07] Conservative estimates say ISIS fighters placed more than 80,000 land mines, booby traps and other improvised explosive devices throughout the city before departing. Most of the devices were victim-activated, utilizing passive infrared sensors, designed to maim and kill returning civilians. ISIS placed devices in every area imaginable including stairwells, furniture, cabinets, doorways, bags of rice and children's toys.

The impacts of ISIS laid devices devastated the re-population of returning residents. In the first three months alone, Human Rights Watch estimated at least 491 civilians were injured or killed. Though the liberation battle had ended and Raqqa was relatively free of overt ISIS fighters, the ERW threat remained a deadly battle field that denied the team access to much of the city.

CROSS-FUNCTIONAL TEAM RAQQA

The first Civil Affairs element to enter Raqqa city limits following liberation was Civil Affairs Team-Raqqa. The ERW threat presented the team with dynamic and complex challenges that forced the team to plan missions differently and utilize equipment in new and creative ways. Foremost, the collaboration between elements on the ground was instrumental to success. Under normal conditions, Civil Affairs Teams conduct missions with four personnel. However, the constant threat of ISIS sleeper cells and ERW presence did not allow the team to operate as an independent four-person element without significant risk to force.

EXPLOSIVE REMNANTS OF WAR LAY IN WAIT FOR UNSUSPECTING VICTIMS WHO ATTEMPTED TO RETURN HOME AFTER RAQQA'S LIBERATION. CONSERVATIVE ESTIMATES SAY ISIS FIGHTERS PLACED MORE THAN 80,000 LANDMINES, BOOBY TRAPS, AND OTHER IMPROVISED EXPLOSIVE DEVICES THROUGHOUT THE CITY BEFORE DEPARTING.

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A commonly utilized version of a Cross-Functional Team pairs CA teams with the SFOD-A and Psychological Operations elements co-located with the team. However, in Raqqa SFOD-As bandwidth was fully absorbed with training, advising, and accompanying partner security forces on daily missions. Also, although Civil Affairs Teams possess a wide variety of unique capabilities, detecting, removing and reducing explosive ordnance is not one. The exceptional conditions on the ground forced the innovation and reorganization necessary to fulfill the mission requirements while minimizing risk to force.

As a result, the CA element established a new version of a CFT that placed an Army Explosive Ordnance Disposal team, a Military Working Dog team and a two to three-person infantry uplift under the command of the Civil Affairs team leader. The EOD and MWD teams added the invaluable ability to detect and clear ERW threats, while the infantry uplift added additional firepower in case of an attack. Through detailed planning, standard operating procedures development and rehearsals, the team cultivated the CFT into a cohesive unit ready to conduct Civil Affairs Operations throughout Raqqa. Civil Affairs Team-Raqqa rebranded as CFT Raqqa for the duration of the deployment.

EXPLOSIVE REMNANTS OF WAR

To address the abundance of ERW, CTF Raqqa, START-FWD, the Raqqa Civil Council, members of Tetra Tech/Aero, Mine Action Group, SOF EOD technicians and other coalition partners met at the RCC's temporary headquarters once a week in Ain Issa, a small city located 50km north of Raqqa. During these meetings, the RCC was encouraged to take the lead to identify their priorities for demining activities. The collective priority of the group emphasized the restoration of essential services. Essential services included water pumping stations, hospitals/clinics, electrical grids, administrative buildings, bakeries, slaughterhouses, and schools. During the first six months following Raqqa's liberation, the brave men and women involved in the physical aspect of demining operations cleared the most critical pieces of infrastructure within Raqqa city limits. Once cleared of ERW, coordination for START-FWD rehabilitation efforts started.

Alongside the active demining effort, CFT Raqqa was on the ground, ready to assess critical infrastructure to aid START-FWD and the RCC in the initiation of rehabilitation projects. CFT Raqqa conducted baseline assessments utilizing their EOD partners and commercial off the shelf quadcopters. EOD technicians would clear small lanes to provide safe opportunities for hands-on evaluations. EOD would then mark the site for deliberate clearance by partner forces, an aspect which also nested with partner SFOD-A's mission to advise and assist Raqqa's security forces.

In addition to enabling critical infrastructure assessments, the EOD partnership allowed freedom of maneuver for all coalition forces working in or passing through Raqqa. CFT Raqqa regularly detected ERW along routes and alleys while they moved. The EOD technicians would remove the ordnance from the location, deem that stretch of the road clear, and provide coalition forces additional options for maneuverable routes through Raqqa. SFOD-As and CFT Raqqa developed and continuously updated an ERW common operating picture, which provided the greater SOF enterprise with a shared understanding of the present risks in Raqqa.

Over six months, the EOD Team identified, removed and reduced over 10,000 lbs. of ERW while supporting CFT Raqqa's mission. The increased freedom of movement enabled CFT Raqqa to conduct assessments of more than 40 critical infrastructure pieces they shared with START-FWD, and the RCC to begin rehabilitation efforts. Equally important, these actions significantly reduced civilian casualties, which was a signifi-

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Cross-functional Team - Raqqa Explosive Ordinance Disposal operators inspect an unexploded air-to-ground munition, which was removed from Raqqa and safely detonated.

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Cross-functional Team - Raqqa team members utilize creative solutions such as quadcopters to conduct route reconnaissance and infrastructure assessments.

U.S. ARMY PHOTOS BY SGT. TRAVIS JONES

cant civil vulnerability that threatened the populace's support for the RCC.

STABILIZATION EFFORTS

CFT Raqqa engaged with RCC key leaders daily to facilitate operations, coordinate efforts and influence decisions to enable legitimate governance in Raqqa. Additionally, the team conducted persistent civil engagements with returnees to further understand local grievances, identify vulnerabilities and enhance visibility of future projects.[08] Despite the continued threat of ERW, Raqqawis continued to return home. Raqqa's citizens risked life and limb in an attempt to resume their normal lives. The number of markets, businesses and construction sites seemingly tripled overnight, with each new week bringing hundreds of Raqqawis home. Through street-level engagements, the CFT Raqqa gathered common grievances in an attempt to identify the most prominent vulnerabilities. The team would relay information back to the RCC to help direct resources and increase the council's transparency of efforts to the population.

WATER

Common grievances, aside from the apparent ERW, included the lack of essential services, especially water. A combination of battle damage and ISIS tunneling rendered the city's underground water system completely non-operational. CFT Raqqa began identifying opportunities to meet the returning population's demand for drinking water. To expeditiously address the growing complaints, the RCC, DoS implementing partners, and DoD entities contracted water trucks to disperse water throughout Raqqa's neighborhoods. With every piece of infrastructure in desperate need of repair, the only way to provide water to civilians was to fill tanker trucks directly from the Euphrates River.

Illnesses began to spread rapidly due to the consumption of contaminated water. START-FWD and CFT Raqqa obtained iodine and chlorine to ensure water treatment and testing for a vast majority of water tankers operating within Raqqa. Additionally, the CFT identified safe routes to help direct the trucks' delivery patterns and avoid ERW threats. With water tankers allocated as a temporary solution, the rehabilitation of water pumping stations located along the Euphrates River bank became a top priority for the RCC, the CFT Raqqa, and START-FWD.

Within a month of working closely together, regular water delivery service started to flow within Raqqa. The increasing demand for water was a continued struggle as the number of returnees skyrocketed. Everyone understood that merely increasing the number and frequency of water trucks was insufficient. The CFT and START-FWD implementing partners placed large water bladders in the areas of highest demand. However, a steady amount of citizens continued complaining to the RCC about waterborne illnesses. To assist the RCC, CFT Raqqa devised a plan to teach SDF soldiers how to use basic methods such as boiling water to decontaminate water. In turn, the soldiers would teach classes throughout different neighborhoods. The team also acquired and distributed several hundred units of 'LifeStraws' provided through the support of a non-profit group in the U.S. Simultaneously, the RCC, CFT Raqqa and START-FWD continued to work together to formulate a plan to refurbish Raqqa's water pipe and sewage system for long term sustainability.

MEDICAL

The medical situation within Raqqa and all of northeastern Syria was dismal. There were limited clinics open, and those that were open maintained poorly trained staff, no medical equipment, and no medication. The U.S. Army Forward Surgical Team co-located with CFT Raqqa, treated a majority of Raqqaqwi trauma patients. While the

FST's primary role was to treat U.S. and partner forces wounded in combat operations, as the liberation battle tapered off and civilians returned to Raqqa, ISF began triaging an overwhelming number of ERW blast wound trauma patients. The FST accepted vetted civilian trauma patients delivered by partner forces and provided surgical interventions and around-the-clock care.

The FST was the first and, for some time, the only functional medical facility within the confines of Raqqa proper. ISIS mined the largest hospital in downtown Raqqa to such an extent that it would take a substantial amount number of EOD technicians months to clear. The CFT's two Special Operation Combat Medics worked with the RCC and its Health Committee to identify viable spaces to re-establish clinics. One clinic, the Seif Al Dawla Clinic, was rehabilitated and opened as the RCC's first functional public health clinic. CFT Raqqa paid for the refurbishment using 1209 funding, procured two generators, consolidated medical equipment from damaged clinics and other facilities and the FST donated class VIII medical supplies.

Additionally, CFT Raqqa coordinated with START-FWD, the FST, and their connections with the World Health Organization and Medecins Sans Frontieres to share information with the community leaders about additional pop-up clinics and vaccination initiatives, to address newly documented cases of polio started appearing within the returning population.[09] The RCC's ability to coordinate and provide vaccinations and fully-staff and equipped clinics would assist in the continued legitimization effort.

CIVIL DEFENSE FORCE

The RCC and CFT Raqqa continued to prioritize the restoration of essential services, to include emergency services. CFT Raqqa partnered with the RCC's Civil Defense Force, a civilian entity similar to an American Fire Department, which provided emergency services to the city's returning population. The Civil Defense Force provided the returning Raqqa community with emergency medical services, water rescue, fire-fighting, and the exhumation of the deceased, both ISIS fighters

and civilians, from various locations throughout the city.

The CFT identified several shortcomings in the force's capabilities, mainly the necessary equipment and training to treat and transfer patients in emergency medical situations. Collaboration with START-FWD, the Raqqa FST and SFOD-As addressed these shortcomings. START-FWD resourced several ambulances, which the Raqqa FST stocked with necessary medical equipment. CFT Raqqa's Special Operation Combat Medics and FST medical specialists created a training program that mirrored an existing SFOD-A medical training program. Training between SOF medical personnel and the Civil Defense Force took place on a weekly basis to bolster the force's capabilities. The continued partnership between the SOF elements on the ground enabled a Civil Defense Force that was increasingly capable of expeditiously and effectively responding to medical emergencies across Raqqa.

SCHOOLS

Rehabilitating schools was another top priority. By 2017, children had already been out of schools for nearly five years. In December 2017, START-FWD informed CFT Raqqa of their intent to conduct small-budget renovations on several primary schools. START-FWD provided the CFT with a list of 20 schools in Raqqa to assess. Their parameters were to identify the schools with minimal structural damage. As map imagery did not provide the necessary clarity, and ground reconnaissance meant getting no closer than 100 feet from each building due to the ERW presence, CFT Raqqa needed to conduct deliberate clearance for assessments. Each assessment would require about a week of planning and preparation for execution. To cut down on time and risk to force, the team used their quadcopter to view all the schools within one day. They identified severe structural damage in most of the school buildings. Structural damage on the roof ruled out the possibility for small-budget renovations, which narrowed the list down from 20 to four or five eligible schools. The team shared the findings with START-FWD, and rehabilitation efforts started within a matter of weeks.

ARAB-KURD RELATIONS:

Perhaps the most formidable threat to stability in the region, particularly in Raqqa, was tension along ethnic lines, as Arabs and Kurds postured for representation in the post-conflict governing body. A long history of cultural and societal differences demonstrated a tense lack of trust between the two ethnicities who have cohabited northeastern Syria for centuries. While close to 80% of the Raqqawi population claims Arab ethnicity, Kurds filled most of the critical positions in the early formation of the RCC.

Almost immediately, CFT Raqqa began to identify an Arab grievance tied to a lack of representation within the RCC. The team opened a dialogue with the sheikh of the region's highest-ranking tribal leader, to mediate differences between Arabs and Kurds and promote increased Arab cooperation with the RCC. Influencing this tribe was critical to local stability. In 2014, this particular tribe was the only Syrian tribe to make an all-encompassing pledge of support to ISIS and frequently provided the group with fighters and support. While the tribe's pledged support for ISIS is initially assessed as concerning, understanding tribal dynamics within the region became paramount. The sheikh did not align with ISIS ideology, rather relied on his ability to maintain relationships to secure the continuity of his tribe. In November, 2017, the sheikh and a prominent Kurdish member of the RCC played a critical role in mediating the surrender of the last ISIS fighters. Their combined mediation efforts are estimated to have saved the lives of hundreds of SDF soldiers, and civilians, and months of continued fighting within Raqqa.

Although initially skeptical about cooperating with U.S. Forces, the sheikh progressively provided CFT Raqqa with expanded access to tribe's key stakeholders to facilitate engagements. A critical factor in gaining favor with the sheikh relied on the team's language capability; two team members maintained 2+ proficiency in the Levantine Arabic dialect. Their ability to build rapport with the sheikh in his native language directly impacted the team's ability to create a cohesive relationship with the otherwise wary tribal leader. CFT Raqqa incrementally incorporated

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RCC leadership in discussions to bolster Arab representation in the RCC and increased cooperation between Arabs and Kurds within the region.

The persistent engagements culminated in a breakthrough decision by the RCC, a decision also supported by DoS and DoD, to hold a series of elections in January to restructure the RCC to promote inclusion. This resulted in a council with a far more representative leadership, an Arab co-president, and Arabs filling influential roles in all of the 14 subcommittees. The sheikh expressed his satisfaction with the restructuring, and he and other prominent tribal members pledged allegiance to the RCC while vowing to promote stability following the elections. This new alliance bolstered RCC's legitimacy and produced a governing body capable of responding to vulnerabilities across ethnic boundaries.

LESSONS LEARNED

Collaboration: Although not doctrinal, recent implementation of CFTs typically incorporate members from the three ARSOF regiments, allowing Civil Affairs, Special Forces and Psychological Operations to execute a comprehensive Special Warfare plan at the tactical level. While this ARSOF construct is often invaluable in many scenarios, this case demonstrated the need to build the CFT towards a specific mission set and balance the required capabilities. The integration of EOD technicians, military working dog teams, and an infantry uplift allowed the team to maneuver freely in a high-threat environment. This cross-functional approach leveraged by CFT Raqqa embodies the fifth ARSOF Truth, "most Special Operations require non-SOF assistance."

Unity of Effort: Some of greatest challenges present when conducting Phase IV Stability Operations arise from the inability of players on the ground to coordinate or synchronize efforts to achieve a common end-state. No entity working within north eastern Syria had the capabilities to conduct security or stabilization efforts alone. The unity of effort promoted between essential actors on the ground such as the Department of State, the Raqqa Civil Council and Department of Defense effectively addressed the ERW threat, and started the process to restore essential services within Raqqa. When Raqqa was liberated it left an immense gap for the RCC to fill. With the aid of START-FWD and teams like CFT Raqqa, civil councils started to build a framework to address security, social well-being, infrastructure rehabilitation, governance and participation.

Creativity: The situation on the ground following the liberation of Raqqa in November 2017 was dynamic and complex. To overcome obstacles, CFT Raqqa developed creative solutions to enable success. The resourceful

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Local Syrian children greet the Cross-functional Team - Raqqa Medic during a Civil Reconnaissance operation in Raqqa, Syria.
U.S. ARMY PHOTO BY SGT. TRAVIS JONES

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implementation of equipment, like the use of commercial quadcopters provided the team with unfettered access in denied terrain. This provided partners with detailed assessments of critical infrastructure to leverage quickly, thus improving the ability of the RCC to provide essential services to the returning population, and increasing legitimacy. Integrating such technology into Civil Affairs Operations was a direct result of the ARSOF attribute of 'Adaptability.'

Cultural Competency: The availability of language proficient team members and an in-depth understanding of the human terrain provided CFT Raqqa with an increased ability to influence key stakeholders across ethnic boundaries. While the team was equipped with a CAT III interpreter, the availability of multiple language proficient team members allowed the CFT to engage with multiple people during an

engagement. Meetings conducted with the returning Raqqawis were a vital element in the team's understanding of the critical vulnerabilities within the population. Not only could the team spend less time on the objective and glean more information, they created additional opportunities for better relationships. These actions emphasized the SOF Imperative, 'understand the operational environment.' These innovative decisions directly impacted the success of Syrian partners, the DoD Task Force, and DoS stabilization efforts.

CONCLUSION

The CFT's continued support for the RCC increased a transparent approach to security, stability, and restoration of essential services. This combined effort was vital to ensuring the dissolution of ISIS's influence not only within Raqqa city limits but also throughout the surrounding areas. As mentioned previously, it was the gap in services and the inability of opposition forces to provide security that allowed ISIS to take control in 2013. Re-enforcing

on the ability of a legitimate government to provide adequate services to the returning population was critical to achieving strategic U.S. goals in Northeast Syria.

The transition from conflict to peace is not seamless. The implementation of sustainable, legitimate and effective governance in Raqqa was paramount to the success of the campaign's defeat of the ISIS Caliphate. The RCC's successful assumption of governance duties would not have been possible without the efforts of a multitude of dedicated entities on the ground, namely, the Department of State, Department of Defense, and non-governmental organizations. CFT Raqqa assumed a mission with unprecedented challenges and served as a critical facilitator for those entities, enabling unity of efforts supporting the RCC's success. The interagency cooperation and 'whole of government' approach to stabilizing post-conflict Raqqa should serve as a successful case study for SOF leaders in future conflicts. 🛡️

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01
Members of Cross-functional Team - Raqqa speak with a local man during an Explosive Remnants of War removal operation in Raqqa, Syria. U.S. ARMY PHOTO BY SGT. TRAVIS JONES

NOTES **01.** "How Raqqa Became the Capital of ISIS." New America. Web.   **02.** "Timeline: the Rise, Spread, and Fall of the Islamic State." Wilson Center, October 28, 2019. Web. **03.** "Timeline: the Rise, Spread, and Fall of the Islamic State."   **04.** "U.N.: Catastrophic Situation in Raqqa, 80 Percent of Buildings Destroyed." The Syrian Observer, April 27, 2018. Web.   **05.** "Joint Publication 3-07: Stability." Joint Force Development. August 3, 2016. Web.   **06.** "U.S. Relations with Syria: Bilateral Relations Fact Sheet, Bureau of Near Eastern Affairs." Department of State, May 6, 2020. Web.   **07.** Feras Hanoush. *The Legacy of ISIS-Manufactured Mines in Raqqa*. Atlantic Council, January 5, 2018. Following the agreement and subsequent withdrawal of the Islamic State from Raqqa on October 15, 2017, ISIS fighters warned 'the land will fight for us,' about the large number of mines planted by the group where practically every house and street is laced with dozens of them.   **08.** FM 3-57 defines Civil Engagement as "the planned and targeted activities in which CA forces deliberately focus on interaction with the IPI, unified action partners, and other civil entities."   **09.** Helen Branswell. *Emergency Polio Vaccinations Considered in Raqqa Following New Report of Paralysis*. Stat Health, July 4, 2017. Web. The WHO coordinated for a first round of vaccinations to target 328,000 children in the two governorates. In 2017, 355 vaccination teams and 61 supervisors were on standby to begin the work.

02

HOPE IN CHAOS:
CIVIL AFFAIRS IN SYRIA

BY SERGEANT FIRST CLASS EVAN BRANSON

BACKGROUND

In the fall of 2017, the U.S. led coalition, in conjunction with members of the Syrian Democratic Forces, successfully liberated the besieged city of Raqqa.[01] Four years earlier, the Islamic State of Syria proclaimed Raqqa as the capital of its caliphate. Leaving the city in ruins and the citizens traumatized, ISIS's retreat from Raqqa created opportunities for malign actors to capitalize on voids in governance and essential services distribution. Given these conditions, the 96th Civil Affairs Battalion deployed Civil Affairs teams throughout North-Eastern Syria to counter the resurgence of ISIS and mitigate civil vulnerabilities for returning civilians.[02] Members of Company C, 96th CA Bn. worked directly alongside members of local civil councils in a concerted effort to restore governance and address the immediate needs of the population. This article focuses on the efforts of CAT 631, alongside members of the 5th Special Forces Group (Airborne), and teams from the 4th Psychological Operations Group (Airborne), to bring hope and stability to the people of Raqqa.
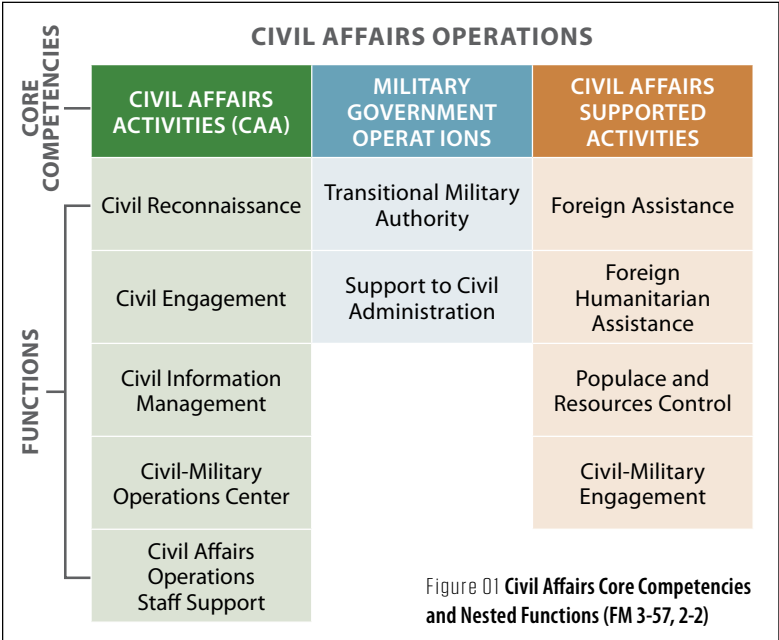
SITUATION

Civil Affairs Team 631 arrived in the city of Ayn Issa in October of 2017 with specific commander's guidance to conduct CA operations. Army Field Manual 3-57, *Civil Affairs Operations,* describes CAO as the unique capability CA provides, focused on the civil component to enable situational understanding and address civil factors that influence the achievement of military objectives and support unified action.[03] With this description in mind, the team's primary objective involved the continued development of the relationship with the nascent Raqqa Civil Council which the previous team, CAT 645, helped to establish during their rotation. The RCC emerged through the election of local Arab and Kurdish citizens who sought to provide leadership in preparation for governance in a post-ISIS Raqqa. Due to the RCC's inability to enter Raqqa, the RCC established the government headquarters within Ayn Issa adjacent to the U.S. Advanced Operating Base and the SDF Headquarters.

This coexistence would prove invaluable in the ability to conduct CAO while also developing a relationship with the RCC. The embedding of a CAT 631 within the civilian population enabled direct interaction and coordination with the civilian populace and expanded situational understanding of an incredibly unique operational environment. Employing three of the fundamental CA Activities of Civil Reconnaissance, Civil Engagement and Civil Information Management (*see figure 01 page 52*), CAT 631 identified the immediate needs of the RCC and the local populace while directly supporting the commander's counter ISIS objective. From the outset, CAT 631 identified its first goal of fostering the burgeoning relationship with the RCC through civil engagements.

CIVIL ENGAGEMENT AND THE RCC

FM 3-57 defines civil engagements as the planned and targeted activities in which CA forces deliberately focus on the interaction with civil entities in an effort to promote the relationship between military forces and the civil component.[04] In the immediate aftermath of Raqqa's liberation, approximately 200,000 citizens that suffered unspeakable atrocities at the hands of ISIS remained in the area. This population had every reason to distrust RCC leadership and the presence of U.S. forces, mostly seen as outsiders. However, CA Soldier's ability to engage a vulnerable population established the value in communicating with partners and civilians alike. Through CE, the RCC established themselves immediately as willing partners in dire need of assistance to address the needs of their civilian population.

02

Residents walk through rubble trying to gain access to a neighborhood in Raqqa, Syria. The city was left in ruins following its liberation from the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant, creating opportunities for malign actors to capitalize on voids in governance and essential services distribution. Civil Affairs Teams were called upon to help counter the resurgence of ISIL and mitigate civil vulnerabilities for returning civilians. U.S. ARMY PHOTO BY SGT. TRAVIS JONES

The use of CE manifested itself in daily meetings where the team and RCC members shared personal stories over endless cups of tea and coffee. This ability to engage not only strengthened the professional relationship, but the personal relationship as well. As the U.S. relationship with the RCC developed and trust grew the doors opened for further engagements with individuals and groups with the society. The local populace provided the RCC and CA members with three main areas of concern:

1. The need for constructing centers for women and children who had suffered under ISIS rule.

2. The destruction of irrigation canals and bridges.

3. Resumption of healthcare.

Through the power of a simple conversation, CAT 631 established the priorities of the community and immediately pursued action alongside its RCC partner to address these concerns.

01

CIVIL AFFAIRS OPERATIONS		
CIVIL AFFAIRS ACTIVITIES (CAA)	MILITARY GOVERNMENT OPERAT IONS	CIVIL AFFAIRS SUPPORTED ACTIVITIES
Civil Reconnaissance	Transitional Military Authority	Foreign Assistance
Civil Engagement	Support to Civil Administration	Foreign Humanitarian Assistance
Civil Information Management		Populace and Resources Control
Civil-Military Operations Center		Civil-Military Engagement
Civil Affairs Operations Staff Support		

CORE COMPETENCIES

FUNCTIONS

Figure 01 **Civil Affairs Core Competencies and Nested Functions (FM 3-57, 2-2)**

A LASTING EFFECT

To address the RCC's first area of concern, the team met with the leadership of the RCC Women's Committee and local women to secure support for the establishment of women's centers. These engagements proved to be the most profound of the entire deployment. In a small, dusty room in Ayn Issa, members of the RCC, CA and local civilians shared stories that created lasting bonds. Looking into the eyes and hearing the stories of the women of Raqqa left an indelible mark as to how much these women had suffered. The connection that developed between CAT 631 and the women of Raqqa produced lasting results and ultimately demonstrated to be one of the more fruitful joint endeavors with the RCC.

Strengthening this relationship resulted in the opening of the RCC Women's Committee Headquarters and two satellite women's centers on the outskirts of Raqqa. Establishing these women's centers not only served the immediate

needs of an estimated female population of 100,000 but also provided a haven for children still suffering from mental and emotional distress. In the near-term, identifying and addressing these concerns enabled the RCC and U.S. forces to proactively mitigate vulnerabilities before becoming unaddressed grievances. One cannot oversell the lasting effects that the centers continue providing for women and children. These locations serve to provide education, livelihood, stability, and hope while enabling children to get the psychological and emotional help they need. Furthermore, these services decrease the chances of the radicalization of a vulnerable population long after U.S. forces leave.

CIVIL RECONNAISSANCE BRIDGES THE GAP

The second area of concern focused on conducting extensive CR of the system of irrigation canals and bridges which serviced Raqqa and the surrounding area. The team assembled members of the RCC, 5th SFG(A) and Psychological Operations to help local citizens in the targeted, planned, and coordinated observation and evaluation of specific civil aspects of the environment. Through this assessment, along with continued CR and CE, CAT 631 illuminated that during the conflict the canal system suffered significant damage. This damage prohibited the transportation of vital water to an estimated 500,000 people and their farms surrounding Raqqa. This damage severely restricted the society's ability to produce crops, which in-turn devastated the local economy. Working alongside RCC engineers, the team identified local workers able to repair the damage to the canals in preparation for the upcoming growing season. Utilizing approximately $150,000 of funds authorized under the National Defense Authorization Act, section 1209 Counter, Train, and Equip Funds CAT 631 provided support to the RCC who employed local workers to repair the canals

02

rapidly.[05] This undertaking, coordinated through PSYOP and the Public Affairs Officer, placed the RCC at the forefront of efforts to restore the canals and provide essential services. The continued promotion of this image served to legitimize the RCC in the eyes of the populace by showing the RCC as capable of providing stability and governance.

In addition to the damage inflicted on the canals, destroyed bridges prevented the transportation of crops into the city. Thus, bridge reconstruction was critical to restoring the primarily agrarian economy and the free flow of goods. Addressing this shortcoming proved significantly more challenging to implement. Leadership from 5th SFG(A) directed attached U.S. Army Reserve engineers to provide temporary metal bridges that restored transportation during the vital crop season. The team saw great success integrating PSYOP with the RCC media team as they worked diligently producing signs and radio broadcasts associating the RCC with the emplacement of bridges and restoration of irrigation canals. Synchronizing these two efforts led to the successful reopening of canals and bridges that provided water and crops to nearly all the citizens living in the Raqqa area. A failure to address the need for water during would have assuredly led to a failed growing season leading to increased instability and the declination of RCC legitimacy.
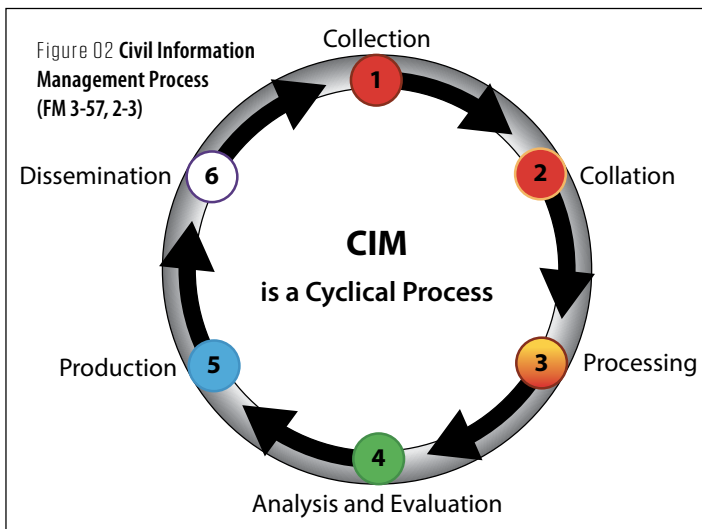
A HEALING HAND

The third point of concern the team focused on involved the reestablishment of healthcare. While conducting CE and CR for irrigation canals and women's centers, the team discovered that the main hospital inside of Raqqa suffered considerable damage, leaving it unable to serve as a suitable location for the provision of healthcare services. To provide a stop-gap for the population, the RCC identified two locations, one to the east and one to the west of Raqqa, that could serve as clinics until the Raqqa hospital reopened. The RCC Health Committee, along with the Women's Committee, identified suitable infrastructure and worked directly with the team in identifying the resources necessary to open these locations. The RCC identified and employed doctors to operate the clinics while also funding the doctor's income.

Simultaneously, CAT 631 obtained necessary funding for the refurbishment of facilities and the purchase of generators through the implementation of the Overseas Humanitarian Disaster Assistance and Civic Aid Program.[06] Utilizing approximately $50,000 the team supported the purchase and divestment of three generators that immediately provided much needed electricity to operate lighting and medical equipment within the clinics. Working through the advanced operating base medic, the team also secured additional necessary medical supplies and provided an ambulance capable of transporting patients to the hospital in the neighboring town of Tabqa, situated approximately 30 miles to the west of Raqqa. Combined efforts between the Team, 5th SFG(A) and the RCC demonstrated the effectiveness of coordination and collaboration in achieving a shared goal. CAT 631 and the RCC expeditiously opened two clinics that immediately provided lifesaving medical care until the reopening of the Raqqa hospital. Without these clinics, the population of Raqqa would be unable to obtain healthcare, leaving them vulnerable and disenfranchised. Though these efforts did not replace the Raqqa hospital's capabilities, it demonstrated the progress of the RCC while addressing an immediate need of the population.

YOU ARE WHAT YOU WRITE

The adage within CA is that "you are what you write". While the most rewarding aspect of serving on a CA Team

Figure 02 **Civil Information Management Process** (FM 3-57, 2-3)

CIM is a Cyclical Process

1 Collection
2 Collation
3 Processing
4 Analysis and Evaluation
5 Production
6 Dissemination

is the unique ability to interact with the population, this only serves as half of the job. Commanders rely on timely and accurate reporting to understand the ongoing tactical situation and CA accomplishes through the CIM process. CIM is the process whereby civil information is collected, analyzed, evaluated and disseminated to the supported element, higher headquarters.[07] The ability to influence operational- and strategic-level decisions makes it imperative to accurately report vital information gathered through CE and CR. Oftentimes, the plethora of information needing input into the CIM process can seem overwhelming, but the CIM process serves as a narrative for what is occurring on the ground in near real-time. If commanders are unaware of what is happening, then they are unable to make truly informed decisions which can have drastic impacts throughout the battlespace.

CAT 631 daily reporting consisted of collating information collected through CE and CR and providing it to the next higher level via team reporting. At these higher levels, the gathered information is evaluated and, ultimately where the CIM process truly occurs. While many elements look at raw data, the CIM process takes this information and produces valuable information. For the CA teams in Syria, leadership from the 91st CA Bn., analyzed the data and produced comprehensive reports which they disseminated to higher-level commanders. The dissemination of this information directly led to operational-level decisions and speaks to the importance of the CIM process in influencing the decisions of commanders at all echelons. The production of comprehensive reports focusing on the civilian component of the operational environment increased the importance of the CIM process altogether and increased the level of top-down support for CA efforts throughout the entirety of Syria.

LESSONS LEARNED

While the lessons learned in Syria were numerous, the most valuable of these lessons is a reminder that dedication to the basic CA activities of CE, CR and CIM, provides unquestioned results. CE is invaluable, but it also takes time to develop connections. The ability to engage with

people will solidify relationships with not just partner forces and civilians, but also with fellow SOF Soldiers. Civil Reconaissance must occur with the understanding that every situation is inherently different; therefore, the team must take the time to appreciate the details and the complexity of every environment. Every CA Soldier must provide the most accurate assessment of the human landscape within the operational environment. Finally, when conducting CIM understand that CA is responsible for providing the commander with expertise of the civil component in the operational environment. Commanders rely on CA input to make the correct decisions concerning the civilian landscape. An ability to convey the current situation within the Human Domain is possibly the most powerful tool that CA Soldiers wield.

CONCLUSION

The post-ISIS landscape within Raqqa, and throughout Syria, served as a stark reminder of the capacity for destruction that human beings possess. The picture of destruction had little comparison throughout history, but the people of Raqqa were a great reminder that the human spirit proves resilient. For CAT 631 and fellow CA teams, Raqqa provided the opportunity to support a resurgence of humanity. Working directly with SOF colleagues and SDF partners, CA Soldiers from the 96th CA Bn., contributed significantly to the overarching goal of preventing the reemergence of ISIS. In doing so CA established itself as an unrivaled force on the modern battlefield, capable of providing commanders with an understanding of the civil component necessary to achieve a complete understanding of the operational environment. The utilization of CA capabilities acted as a catalyst to return hope and stability to the people of Syria. 🛡️

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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NOTES **01.** "Syrian Democratic Forces Liberate Raqqa." defense.gov, N.p., www.defense.gov/Explore/News/Article/Article/1349213/syrian-democratic-forces-liberate-raqqa/. Accessed 15 June 2020. **02.** "Syria Crisis: Northeast Syria Situation Report no. 17." N.p., reliefweb.int/report/syrian-arab-republic/syria-crisis-northeast-syria-situation-report-no-17-1-20-october-2017. Accessed 15 June 2020. **03.** Department of the Army, Field Manual 3-57, Civil Affairs Operations (Washington, DC: Army Publishing Office, April 17, 2019), 2-1, 2-2, 2-4. **04.** Ibid. **05.** "Train and Equip Program for Syria: Authorities, Funding, and Issues for Congress." Congressional Research Service, N.p., fas.org/sgp/crs/natsec/R43727.pdf. Accessed 15 June 2020. **06.** "Defense Security Cooperation." Defense Security Cooperation Agency, N.p., www.dsca.mil/programs/humanitarian-assistance-disaster-relief-mine-action. Accessed 15 June 2020. **07.** Ibid, 3.

LIKE WAR: THE WEAPONIZATION OF SOCIAL MEDIA

The Islamic State. Russia. China. Taylor Swift. What makes all of these actors relevant to the U.S. Army Special Operations Command? The answer is simple. Through social media, celebrities and threat actors alike have become enabled to digitally message and interact with large audiences on scales never seen before. Each of these actors has realized that the internet is a battlefield and we are all a part of it. This is the basic premise of P.W. Singer and Emerson T. Brooking's 2018 book "Like War: The Weaponization of Social Media."

Similar to cyber warfare's hacking of networks, Singer and Brooking's "Like War" describes the hacking of people through mixtures of viral content, well constructed narratives, and the manipulation of social media algorithms. As the use of social media has skyrocketed exponentially across the globe, what were once battles for popularity and perception have merged with real world conflicts of flesh and blood. Researched and written over a five year period, the authors have provided the first in depth study of global conflict and its ties to digital platforms.

The authors begin their work with a short and concise history of the internet, explaining its growth from two university computers to a global network of interconnected machines and users. By showing where the internet came from in a succinct history, the authors set the conditions to describe the rise of today's social media empires. By the book's closing chapters, even the most technologically illiterate readers will understand the implications of Artificial Intelligence and neural networks on waging war.

What sets "Like War" apart from other studies of cyberspace, is how each chapter unfurls into a succinct study on topics ranging from censorship and disinformation to weaponized narratives influencing real-world behavior. As the authors describe the 2008 live-streamed terror attacks in Mumbai and the 2014 advance of ISIS across Iraq, the immediate consequences of weaponized information becomes readily apparent to any practitioner of irregular warfare.

The authors truly shine in their ability to demonstrate the importance of wielding influence using social media. Spending nearly half of the book focused on the importance of narrative and messaging, Singer and Brooking emphasize the human factors that drive digital influence. With social media forming the "foundation of modern day social, political, and commercial life," the authors make it clear that the digital battles for our attention and our engagement can be just as important as real world activities. By failing to build digital communities and tap into authentic narratives, modern day competitors can lose — whether it be pop music fans, votes in an election, or the control of a battlefield.

As the U.S. Special Operations Command continues to lead global efforts to counter violent extremism and compete with adversaries below the threshold of armed conflict, it is imperative that special operations forces understand how social media can be used to shape their operational environment. In today's digital world, a smartphone and well delivered viral post can shape battlefields just as much if not more than a barrage of artillery. With its short, well written chapters and numerous examples across the spectrum of conflict, "Like War" is the perfect primer for members of the special-operations community to understand the impact of social media on warfare. **SW**

BOOK DETAILS

By P.W. Singer and Emerson T. Brooking
New York, New York:
Houghton Mifflin Press,
2018, 416 pages;
ISBN: 978-132869574
Price: $28.00

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FOREIGN WEAPONS TRAINING, FORT BRAGG, NORTH CAROLINA

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